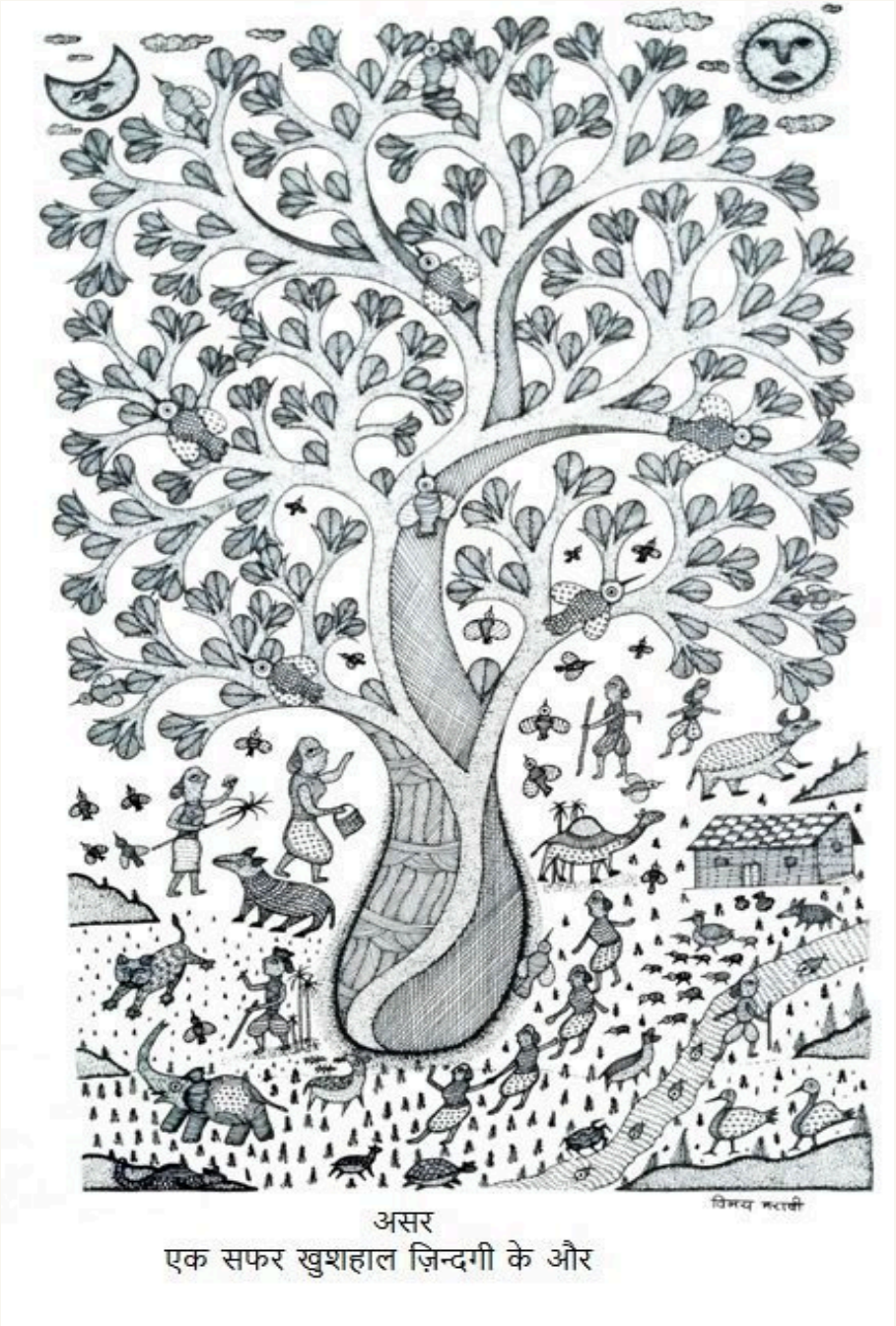
Co-creating Agro-ecological Resilience: Action Research with Forest-dwelling *Adivasis* of Central India: lessons in integration and collaboration

P Seema, ATREE Bengaluru | Parijat Ghosh, PRADAN New Delhi

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The problem context

- Slow progress in indicators of wellbeing despite development interventions
- Homogenised imagination of development
- Unique social-ecological institutions under threat
- Weak establishment of mainstream governance institutions & conflicts
- Increasing vulnerability and insecurities – social, economic, ecological
- Subjugation of local knowledge systems
- Youth torn between traditions and modernity

Agro-ecological vulnerability

- Unique ecotones and agri-food systems
- Marginal holdings without fences - pooled commons of farm lands
- Farms contiguous with forests and village commons - grazing, forest and water commons
- Trying to emulate mainstream intensive farming
- Increasing external dependence in farming, food & nutrition; health care
- Increasing dependence on formal and informal credit
- Shrinking forest, grazing and water commons – declining livestock & diversity in food and livelihood
- Alienation from forest & other land use management
- Migration, cultural and health issues

Approaching the context: Journey from ARSI to ASAR

Phase 1: Back end work and discussions

- Academics and practitioners deliberating deskilling
- Action Research on Sustainable Intensification (ARSI)
- Villagers at the centre: their definition of the problem and the solutions they want
- Resurrect community wide deliberation as norm and culture in the community
- Gathering and sharing experiences from other relevant contexts, sciences and practitioners



Phase 2: Common goal & Action

- Villagers defining their common goal: *Khushaal Zindagi* (KZ - good life)
- Understanding the hindering factors in achieving KZ:
  - external factors – many
  - declining adaptive skills - individuals and socio-cultural institutions
- Focus of villagers: agroecological skilling
- Deliberating how to come up with solutions towards KZ
- How to plan phases & start implementing them ensuring inclusivity and information flow
- Project: Adaptive Skilling through Action Research (ASAR)

Adaptive Skilling through Action Research (ASAR)

Adaptive skilling in agroecology by integrating sciences

- Informed and deliberative adaptation to changes/ pressures/ introductions - crops, varieties, seeds, agronomic & crop protection practices, forestry & livestock practices and watershed management

- Integrating indigenous knowledge & people with experiential knowledge of development practitioners, institutionalized formal science inclusive of its' relevant branches to instil capacities, processes and institutions of adaptive skilling

What worked well

- Field experience and transdisciplinary openness of development practitioners and researchers involved
- Preparatory informal but systematic conversations with groups of villagers
- First series of village wide meetings about the idea of good life (KZ)
- Break out groups - women, youth, elderly, children
- Dialogues between the groups to iron out misalignment and coming up with village charter
- Voluntary formation of open *adhyayan* (study) groups as part of the research group
- Regular meetings: on-site and in the field offices
- Village meets: begin with songs familiar to, or new ones by community; road map preparation and periodic revisits; discuss selected translated short videos on relevant stories on transformative changes
- Confluence - exchange of knowledge between the villagers
- Biodiversity register and knowledge transfer



Enabling factors: Prevailing indigenous knowledge with few individuals; Community's acceptance of PRADAN staff; Ethnic homogeneity / cohesion

Transdisciplinary preparation for integration (solutions & processes) by the research group

- ASAR song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrmpvI9fnm8

What worked moderately well



Experiments (crop fields and common lands)

- Paddy experiment worked well and the village started cultivating indigenous varieties
- Terrace farming in steep slopes was adopted in some villages, where some funding could be managed for construction of terraces



Why?

- Keen interest in tasty, nutritious staple grain
- Reducing expenditure in farming
- Increasing the productivity/ getting stable yield

What didn’t work well

Adhyayan groups – ceased to be functional in some villages

- Where it was functional, self driven momentum diminished
- PRADAN staff needed to nudge their regular meetings and this couldn’t continue till adhyayan group became a naturalised village institution

Reasons

- Lack of field staff dedicating partial time for ASAR
- Conflict between interests e.g. powerful actors were not being supportive in cases where their interest was at stake

Picture gallery



Monthly Village meeting at Jana



Villagers of Jana developing their KZ charter and plan



Planning in subgroups



Elderly taking children to Forest to teach about plants and usage Jana JH



Adhyayan group member fo Chataniha explaining about their seeds and agril practices to Adhyayan group members of Ghughri



Mapping the slopes and identifying suitable sites for different land use



Villagers constructing terrace



Villagers exposure to terrace construction site



terraced land for checking soil erosion and sustainable intensification

The way ASAR informed

Communities / Villages

• Accepted need for deliberative culture and adaptive skills

• Realisation of the possibility and process for defining and driving their own good life

• Community's realisation of their need to document traditional knowledge and transfer to the younger generation

PRADAN

• Other initiatives included the visioning exercise (similar to KZ) as part of the process

• Awareness around importance of looking at agriculture land and forest together - not individual separate interventions

• Awareness around bio-diversity and forest rejuvenation: as co-enquiry integrative knowledge formation

• Importance bringing together the indigenous knowledge and modern science

Researchers

• Awareness on the effort and time needed on the ground for solution oriented integration of sciences with indigenous systems (example)

Collaborative Publications:

- Working Paper (Research group): https://publications.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/5173/
- Ethnomedicine and biodiversity Register (Temba Oraon from Jana Adhyayan group with other research team members): https://vikalpsangam.org/article/how-adivasis-of-one-jharkhand-village-are-trying-to-preserve-ethnomedicine/
- Collection of knowledge material consolidated by the research group members after first confluence: https://www.pradan.net/sampark/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ASAR-First-Confluence.pdf
- Collection of knowledge material consolidated by the research group members after second confluence: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/search?q=second%20confluence%20booklet