

Change Maker: Smiles on the faces of people from the target community

- Shamsuddin D Baligar

Sri S.D. Baligar is the Founder and active Project Director of Vanasiri Rural Rural Development Society (VRDS), Ranibennur, Haveri district, Karnataka. I wish to state my cause, commitment, sustained efforts and bringing the social transformation in Karnataka.

I came from a poor family. Father is a small farmer in village called Haranagiri near Ranibennur and ours is a joint family. I studied in the village government school and finished my Bachelor of Arts (B.A) on earning myself as a Compounder in a Private clinic. During clinical service myself was exposed to Rural development work, because the Doctor of the clinic was actively involved in NGOs health service activities.

After my graduation I joined reputed NGOs and served on various capacities. I got more learning from community rather than school education. This learning seems that achieved more than master degree or any Doctorate.

The NGO, what I was serving, restricting, controlling me to take issues forward. Hence I decided to start my own NGO to work with vibrant community by using my knowledge, skill and zeal. I discussed this with my colleagues, friends and well wishers. Ultimately on 15th May 2004 a group of 7 members joined together and registered Vanasiri Rural Development Society (VRDS) at Ranibennur to work for the upliftment of the downtrodden community.

Initially we started to work in 5 grama panchyaths of Byadgi, Hirekerur and Ranibennur taluks and Ranibennur urban slums of Haveri district. We focused to work with dalit, lambani, muslim, landless, marginal and small farmers. Formed women self help groups (SHGs), laborers groups, federation etc, Basic orientation and organization works were initiated. Due to financial constraints intervention was very limited. While working with them I found several burning problems like exploitation on the target group community, migration, inactiveness of Grama Panchyaths, corruption, school dropouts (especially in Lambani tanda, harijan colony and urban slums), irregularities in anganawadi and public food distribution systems.

Fortunately, through our friends circle I came to know about Andheri Trust work in Karnataka, I approached Sri Monis, Regional Officer, Andheri Trust, Mangalore, submitted concept note, discussed with him in detail on the problems and intervention could be made. We had fruitful discussion on poverty and empowerment process with Monis. Later Andheri Hilfe bonn/Andheri Trust helped VRDS for 2 years. This financial help as well as donors time to time field visit and partners meet helped us me a lot to become a change maker. With our committed efforts target people are able to access employment, access their food rights, improvement in supply of nutrition and health service etc., some milestone achievements are –

Employment: There were lot of irregularities in implementation of Employment Scheme. Contractors and corrupt elected representative jointly violated norms of the scheme at Panchayat level. 100 days works were not given, job cards were in the hands of elected representatives, wages not paid correctly.

With support of the Andheri trust we organized laborers and their unions, educated on the scheme guidelines, empowered them to address the violating norms. Facilitated to conduct social audit, media advocacy, network with likeminded organizations, direct interfacing with CEO and other senior officers, thus the situation turned in favor of the laborer groups.

As on date 3000 laborers are organized in different groups/union, received Rs.1.50 crore wages directly to their respective bank accounts. Even in severe drought, they got job locally, worked more than 100 days employment. Each laborer is contributing Rs.200/- p.a. towards taluk union to address their common issues on their own strength. Labors sangha representative contested in the recent grama panchyath election and got elected. This was One of the most unique change took over in Budapanahalli grama panchayath, by having the labor groups' representative in the Panchayath. Migration is totally reduced, laborers are acting decision makers at the Panchayat level, through PRA exercise themselves prepared action plan and submitting to Panchayath. The senior officer and district administration asking VRDS help to guide the similar PRA exercises in other Grama Panchyaths.

Livelihood support: In the early days due to debt, Government banks were not able to give lone to villagers. It was very hard for the villagers to approach the bankers. Today, the women are organized themselves in Self Help Groups, got different income generation skill, over Rs.3.00 crores credit facilities availed and become successful entrepreneurs in agriculture and non agriculture activities. Now bankers are calling SHGs to take up loans, because they retained 100% repayment and prompt business.

Health and Nutrition: SHGs and Federation got knowledge on the function and service of Anganawadi, Asha worker, ANM, Primary Health Centre on health and nutrition services. They approach Doctors and different stake holders for conducting health camp, regular visits and services to mother and child, adolescent and women under ICDS programme. Critical malnourished babies found and admitted to rehabilitation centers. This monitoring programme by local SHGs also impacted on improvement of children's attendance at Anaganawadi and Primary education.

Education : Islampura slum of Ranibennur is having over 500 families. Muslim and other backward community are residing. Beedi (home made cigarette) work is the major occupation of the community. The whole family (Muslim community) involved without caring their health and children's future. VRDS organized 12 SHGs and motivated them to learn health, nutrition, education, income and other development aspects of the slum. Further, we formed Slum Development Committee, through that identified 36 dropout or non going school children, the slum did not have Government school. It also caused for lack of children education. Slum development committee brought this worst situation to the notice of District Administration, District Judge, Education Department and Publics. Committee also complained to the Karnataka State Child Protection Committee. With all these efforts Islampura slum got sanction the government school for the children, now children are getting free uniform, text book, shoe, tie etc., and learning with joyfully.



Public Food Supplies (PDS) : Bhavapura tanda women are struggling badly to get their monthly ration quota, by walking up to 6 k.m. to Koda village, of Hirekerur taluk. The hamlet not having any transport facility or pakka road. They have spend whole day, standing in a long queue Collectiøng ration and walking was even too worse during rainy season in a mud road. Women were feared on their husband or any men for sending to get ration, because they experienced that the food quota of the month mens were sold to others in town and used that money for alcohol.

Sri Sevalal Mahila SHG Okkuta (federation) took lead and demanded PDS shop for their hamlet in very systematically. First they approached nearby taluk officer of Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department. Initially they ignored the demand and said to them minimum 300 ration card is required for opening PDS shop. But that hamlet having only 175 cards. Women federation not stepped back for their demand. Continued their efforts urged Tasildar, Deputy Director of Food and Civil Supplies (District level senior officer) and MLA on their demand brought their problems in getting rations. Over 2 years continuous struggle government sanctioned Mini PDS shop to Bhavapura tanda. Now villagers are getting their food quota regularly in a month, women found end for their drudgery in getting food supply.

Through VRDS it is possible to bring visible change and smiles on the faces of people from the marginal community. A special thanks to Andheri Trust /Andheri Hilfe Bonn for their precious and wonderful support.

