

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE RISE OF SHG'S AMONG THE TRIBALS OF GOA

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**Abstract:** The debate on transitions in livelihood system of the tribal communities seems to occupy a centre stage in tribal forums. Undoubtedly, the Goan tribes are too witnessing dynamism in their livelihoods. The emergence of new livelihood activities and changes taking place in the existing ones are a testimony to the aforementioned fact. Activities such as cashew cultivation, the *porsu* vegetation and the eventual rise of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Agricultural Cooperative Societies in the tribal hamlets villages rooted through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project undertaken by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) has received significant impetus among the Velip Scheduled Tribe inhabiting the villages of Gaondongrem and Cotigao in the taluka of Canacona in south Goa.

The Agri- Cooperative Project facilitated the formation of two significant collective farming cooperative societies and augmentation of Self Help Groups (SHG's). The villages of Gaondongrem and Cotigao hence have witnessed a swift growth in the number of women as well as men SHGs in the last three years. The project was supported by the Goa State Tribal Welfare Department, Department of Agriculture and Horticulture Government of Goa, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Goa and other government departments and bodies. The major emphasis of the SHG's have been on cultivation, particularly chilly and other vegetables, preparation of vermicompost fertilizer and participation in allied activities. The women are now increasingly engaged in multi tasks throughout the year. The communitarian lifestyle and collective responsibilities upheld by the women have enabled them to create a fair demand for their products in the market.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Self Help Groups (SHG's), *Porsu*, Cashew

### INTRODUCTION

Livelihood concerns especially of the marginalised groups occupy centrality in the discussions of academic and non-academic forums. Transitions in livelihood systems of the tribes are witnessed with the emergence of new livelihood activities and changes taking place in the existing ones. The tribals living in the hinterlands of south Goa have experienced a gradual process of change in their livelihood systems. The launching of Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) Agri Cooperative Project as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the villages of Cotigao and Gaondongrem is considered as a major step in bringing transformation in their livelihood. The Agri Cooperative Project facilitated the formation of two significant Collective Farming Cooperative Societies and Self Help Groups (SHG's). Accordingly, the Khotigao Collective Farming Cooperative Society and Gaondongrem Collective Farming Society were formed in the two villages.

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The villages witnessed a significant increase in the number of women as well as men SHGs in the last three to five years. The project was supported by Goa State Tribal Welfare Department, Department of Agriculture, Department of Horticulture, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Goa and other government departments and bodies. The major emphasis of the SHG's has been on cultivation, particularly chilly and other vegetables, preparation of vermi-compost fertilizer and participation in allied activities. The women are now increasingly engaged in multi tasks throughout the year. The communitarian lifestyle and collective responsibilities upheld by the women have enabled them to create a fair demand for their products in the market.

### **Launching of the Agri cooperative Project**

The Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) launched the Agri Cooperative Project in the year 2012 with a general aim to enhance livelihood opportunities and increase agriculture productivity of tribals living in the remote locations in South Goa. The project found relevance with the findings of the Baseline survey report revealing that almost 80% of population in the hinterlands engaged in agriculture. Inadequate irrigation facilities, monocropping done only during monsoon limit the employment opportunities of agricultural labour. Activities such as cattle farming, dairying or poultry were found deficient. The report also mentioned the inadequacy of irrigation facility, small land holding, use of poor quality seeds, less use of organic fertilizers and absence of agriculture extension services as major gaps in the system. Vegetables and paddy were grown predominantly in these areas but their productivity levels were low due to inefficient practices and poor extension support.

### **Report Suggestions**

The report suggested a proper agriculture extension support system, crop diversification and allied activities to increase agriculture productivity in the region. It also suggested crop rotation of paddy with vegetables and pulses by applying organic fertilizers or bio pesticides and diversification with other allied agriculture activities like vermi composting, poultry, honey beekeeping and dairy. The approach involved interaction with different stakeholders at the village and community level, especially small, marginal and landless labourers and local panchayat and agriculture department.

The following objectives were outlined under the project:

- a) Community organisation through collective activities
- b) Nurturing agriculture and allied activities
- c) Empowering community for employment generation
- d) Resource mobilisation and fund raising for entrepreneurial initiatives

### **The Action Programme**

The project was looked after by the agency of National Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) hub. It was facilitated by State and local government bodies such as Goa Agriculture Department, Goa State Co-operative Milk Producers' Union Ltd., NABARD regional office, local administration and village panchayats.

It was decided to form farmer groups within hamlets to enable the creation of a village level federation that will be run by the members with the support of GSL and monitored by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. Accordingly, two cooperative societies were registered in Cotigao and Gaondongrem. The Velips demonstrate a closed type of a society. Formation of the cooperative societies was facilitated as the tribal kinsmen cooperate at various stages of work. Thus, "cooperative" and "kinsmen" are characterised by reciprocity in tribal societies (Nulkar V. K. & Muthumani M. K. 2014). Basic infrastructure was created, and a field office was started in Cotigao. The emphasis was also given to adopt several allied activities through a series of training programs, infrastructure support activities and continuous field support. Technical training programmes are conducted every month in collaboration with ICAR Goa and seeds and fertilizers are distributed the farmers. Training programmes are also conducted on honeybee hives and vermi compost. A plan was evolved to do collective marketing of the produce generated by the farmers in order to secure the best possible price.

### **Augmentation of Self Help Groups**

The villages of Gaondongrem and Cotigao have witnessed a swift growth of men and women SHG's. The major emphasis of the SHG's have been on cultivation, particularly chilly and other vegetables, preparation of vermi compost fertilizer and participation in allied activities. The women SHG's generally bear names of goddesses and feminine character, while the men SHG's bear names of gods. Some prominent women SHG's are the Kamakshi SHG, Kulgati SHG, Laxmi SHG, Anita SHG, Mamata SHG, Sanjivani SHG, etc. Some men SHG's are Shivapurush SHG, Shivrath SHG, etc. Men SHG's are few in number compared to that of women. Men SHG's are offered with tractors, cutters and other tools required for cultivation by ICAR. The introduction of tractors to men SHG's has brought about a massive transformation in the domain of cultivation. There are thirty-six SHG's in the Gaondongrem and twenty-four in the village of Cotigao.

The Agri Cooperative Project has benefitted the SHG's in several ways. The self-help groups are provided with free services such as seeds as well as fertilizers by the Department of Horticulture. Help is also further extended to transport (cost) the produce to the marketing points. Wells have been dug near the areas of cultivation to facilitate proper irrigation of lands. However, the most significant

aspect of the project has been the training imparted to men as well as women covering various aspects for raising the productivity of crops.

As Tapan (2015) rightly mentions, the ability to enhance livelihoods of the rural poor is constrained by a range of inter-related structural, social, economic and institutional barriers. Now however, the women are now increasingly engaged in multi tasks throughout the year. This in a way has brought a change in their livelihoods. Two major activities undertaken by the SHG's are vegetable production and preparing vermi compost fertilizer. The major vegetable crop grown was the chilly in addition to cluster beans, brinjal, ladyfinger, mazecorn, *tambdi bhaji* (*Amaranthus carentus* L.), *irville* (*vaal*) (Yard long beans or *Vigna sesquipedalis* (L.) Verdc.). All women members take part in these collective works and effectively share the responsibilities between them. The members have evolved a framework to carry out the different cultivation roles such as fencing, watering, providing fertilizers, weeding, collection of vegetables, marketing, visiting distribution centres, maintaining records, banking, etc. The production of vegetables and vermi compost is showing an increase and has created a fair demand in the market.

Women SHG members are involved in common funding activity. In addition to these activities, the SHG women members participate in village, taluka and state cultural programmes and competitions. They exhibit a rich variety of folk items in the form of folk dances such as the *fugdi* and other dance forms. The women also prepare traditional sweets, snacks, dishes, wild fruits, underground roots, homemade foods and sell them during socio cultural festivals, *jatras* under the banner of their SHG.

### **Expanding the Water Base**

The focus of the project was to empower the downtrodden farmers, which were until now only seasonal farmers, and to make them full time farmers. The agriculturist community of the Velips were mainly dependent on *kharif* (Cultivation undertaken in rainy season) seasonal cropping. The initiative of the project was to make them produce also during the *rabi* (Cultivation undertaken in winter season) season. One of the major thrust areas of the farming society is to harness the water availability in the villages and Gaondongrem and Cotigao. Their struggle for water is acute as they are devoid of water even for drinking purposes and other utilities. Studies have pointed to the fact that tribal dominated states such as Jharkhand and Orissa which have the potential of becoming the largest exporters of 'virtual water' to the rest of the country are also the most food insecure states and end up importing virtual water in the form of food grains from water-scarce regions of the nation (Phansalkar & Verma, 2004, p. 3473). The villages of Gaondongrem and Cotigao are now experiencing a steady increase in the number of ground water wells, bore wells and expansion of existing wells. Many abandoned wells are brought in use, especially for cultivation purposes.

The provision of motors for pumping of water through the wells and river canals has brought a tremendous relief to the tribals.

Twenty-two wells have been excavated so far; eleven in Gaondongrem and eleven in the Cotigao village. The society has proposed to excavate more ten wells in both the villages. Furthermore, for the purpose of extracting water, the society has provided the groups with motor pumps. Till date, 69 pumps are provided to the farming families. Initially, the pumps driven by petrol and kerosene were allotted to the farmers. It was realised that the people had a problem in procuring kerosene and petrol fuels and therefore, electric power pump came to be distributed. Thus, out of the total of 69 pumps, 15 electric pumps were distributed. The society plans to provide the groups only with electric pumps. The average cost of a single kerosene or petrol pump initially allotted to the SHG was rupees twenty six thousand, while the costing of an electric pump is rupees fifteen thousand. Accessories such as pumps, fertilizers, seeds and saplings from professionally maintained agricultural nursery were also allotted.

The project officer and other extension officers of the society anticipate that this five-year term project has provided the community with a foundational infrastructure to sustain and develop with the activities centred on agriculture. They also believe that the corpus fund generated by the cooperative society will certainly give a boost to the farming community. It is estimated that the GSL spends an amount of rupees twenty five to thirty lakhs for the two societies every year. However, it is noteworthy that among the different projects initiated by the GSL in various parts of the State, the agri project in Canacona has been accepted and responded well particularly by the tribal population.

#### ***Porsu* (Kitchen Garden or Homestead Farming) and Chilly Cultivation**

As a result of these interventionist strategies, the *porsu* production has increased to a considerable extent during the last three years. The villagers are no longer dependent on the market for their vegetables. Vegetables such as chilly, onion and cluster beans are marketed. In the past, the Velips undertook chilly cultivation in the hilly tracts known as *kumeri* (shifting cultivation). Now, with the restrictions imposed on shifting cultivation, the velips are increasingly turning to low land farming. A single family sometimes produces eight kilogram of chilly from the *porsu*. They seasonally earn rupees of nine thousand from green chilly that is marketed to Adarsh Co-operative Society at Khalwadem. They are now producing to meet the requirements of other people. Some tribals move outside their villages and display their products for sale in the weekly market in the nearby town area; there are also others who market their products at the roadsides at some strategic locations of the national highway (NH) 17. Those who grow onion produce at least fifteen to twenty onion fatios (bunches). Some even produce forty *fatios* of onion from their *porsu*.

During the current season, the group have produced five-quintal chillies. With the start of the season they sold chillies at the price of rupees twenty-eight per kilogram. At the end of the season they got a price of rupees forty-one per kilogram. The selling of chillies was soon followed by marketing of other vegetables such as brinjal, cluster bean and ladyfinger. The supply of vegetables is done once in a week. Until now, they have marketed five quintal of chilly this season. They produce 15 kilogram chilly every week. Every member has earned an income of rupees 3500 from the SHG activities.

The total supply of vegetables done to the horticulture department was gross ten tonnes from both (Gaondongrem and Cotigao) the societies (2013-14), the income of which was around rupees ten lakh. During the year 2014-15, the total gross produce was twenty-six tonnes fetching twenty lakh rupees. However, the selling rate during the year 2014-15 was lesser than the preceding year. It was expected to grow four times more than the previous year, but the production lessened due to unseasonal rains destroying the crop. 520 households are getting direct benefit from the project and 2500 people are getting benefit from increased income to family and vegetable supply.

Similarly, with the intervention programmes of the ICAR, cashew plantation has evolved as yet another sustainable area. The post liberation period witnessed a phenomenal growth of cashew plantation in the State of Goa. Cashew has evolved as a major crop in the State and is generating employment in the villages and contributing to state's economy (Dessai, 2009). The hills as well as the plain areas bear a heavy concentration of cashew plantation and other productive and non-productive trees as well. The hilly topography of Gaondongrem and Cotigao is an important factor favouring the high productivity of cashew plantation.

### **Vermi Compost Farming**

Besides vegetables, the production of vermi compost fertilizer has received a good response from the tribal communities. Members of SHG's were imparted with training programmes by the officials from ICAR. Several vermi compost units have been set up around a cluster of houses in the different hamlets. A hamlet of forty to fifty houses has at least two to three vermi compost units. The activity is not seasonal and hence, can be taken up throughout the year. The women have shown a great enthusiasm in the activity. The fertilizers too have received a good response from the market, thereby increasing the income levels of the group members.

Vermi compost fertilizer of 25 tonnes produced by the SHGs has been sold to the government. Yet another 25 tonnes has been sold to farming communities who are not members of the cooperative society. In addition to the demand created for Vermicompost fertilizer by the government, some private marketing bazaars such as the Bagayatdar and others insist for more production of vermi compost from the

tribal families. The members of the cooperative society mentioned that it has an additional fifteen tonnes of vermi compost in reserve. The cooperative society purchases one kilogram of vermi compost for rupees nine from the farmer, and sells for rupees twelve at wholesale rates and rupees fifteen for retail business.

The cooperative society has significantly aided the self-help groups by providing the groups with the units and worms too for manufacturing of vermi compost. The cooperative societies have been benefitted immensely by selling worms, as the demand is good in the open market. The society members boast of receiving good profit from the selling of worms. However, they admitted that marketing the worms is a difficult task as it involves care to be taken while transportation of worms, particularly because the worms have to be transported under controlled temperature settings. At the initial stage, the cooperative society purchased worms of rupees fifty-six thousands from the neighbouring State of Karnataka. Today, the society has become self-sufficient and is also able to provide worms for others.

#### **Projects and Programmes Carried Out by ICAR**

The Indian Council for Agricultural Research has initiated and carried out several projects under the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) during the last four years exclusively for the tribals communities throughout the State. All these projects are aimed at improving the livelihood of the tribal people. Some of the ambitious projects implemented and introduced for the tribes in the villages of Gaondongrem and Cotigao include mechanisation programme for small and marginal tribal farmers (provision of tractors), naturally ventilated greenhouse for seedling production and crop cultivation, programmes for enhancing rice productivity, popularising plantation crops, spices and mangoes, the development of water harvesting tanks (Jalkunds), bio-input production and enhancing organic food security, improved varieties of ornamental crops and seed distribution, improved varieties of vegetable seeds, demonstration and capacity building programmes as motivational exercises.

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