

Rural development for achieving MDGs

Welthungerhilfe launched the Millennium Villages initiative in 2006 in 15 locations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Working on the “Help towards Self Help” motto, these villages are models of how hunger, poverty, illiteracy, disease and environmental destruction can be fought with moderate financial resources and corresponding knowledge in different geographical contexts.

With a GDP growth rate of 8 percent and projected to be one of the leading economies in the world by 2020, India appears to be shining brightly as it surges towards development. However, there are large areas in the rural interior where this lustre is conspicuously absent. India figures in the “alarming” category in the Global Hunger Index and is ranked a low-scoring 134 out of 182 countries in the Human Development Index. Ironically, the majority of these poor areas coincide with the ‘red corridor’ region in Eastern India which is experiencing a surge in Maoist activities. These districts, spread across eight states, are among some of the poorest and most backward in the country.

Two Millennium Villages in Eastern India

Coincidentally, the two Millennium Villages supported by Welthungerhilfe in India are located in this troubled region. One is *Sarwan* in Deoghar district,

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Jharkhand State and the other is *Gandhiji Songha* in Purulia District, West Bengal State. Jharkhand is ranked in the “alarming” category in the India State Hunger Index – 17 of 23 districts in the state are classified as food insecure – while Purulia is ranked 17th (income index), 15th (gender index) and 12th (health index) out of 17 districts in the West Bengal Human Development Report (2004).

Against this background Welthungerhilfe launched the “Millennium Villages Initiative” in eight villages in Gandhiji Songha (1,185 scattered households with 7,000 inhabitants) and 26 villages in Sarwan (862 households with 5,200 inhabitants) with the close collaboration, technical expertise and commitment of the local partner organisations Centre for World Solidarity, Pravah and Kalyan. Both regions are rainfed, with the attendant problems related to subsistence agriculture. By applying an integrated watershed approach, Sarwan is trying to address MDGs 1, 2 and 3, while Gandhiji Songha is trying to address all the MDGs using a similar approach.

Addressing the MDGs and monitoring achievements

One major aspect of this initiative is MDG monitoring, which is stream-



Photo: J. Boethling

lined across all Millennium Villages. It comprises of two parts: a questionnaire survey (quantitative method) and a participatory workshop (qualitative method). Welthungerhilfe partners use the questionnaire, based on the official UN indicators, to gather data in the villages. The survey is carried out annually in 89 households in both locations. Both locations conduct a Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA) workshop annually, at which village representatives analyse the situation on the ground and relate it to the MDGs. Attended by a large cross section of the population, including different committee members, local government officials, youth groups, and women’s groups, the participants go through a stepwise process at the beginning to determine which changes they want to measure against the MDGs. Each topic is then analysed in relation to a timeline in order to establish trends going back over seven years.

Based on the timeline analysis, factors for improving the situation are prioritised and annually reviewed. Gandhiji

Welthungerhilfe Millennium Villages Initiative

- Contribution to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can be measured
- 15 villages in 13 countries on three continents
- Regular consultations and progress monitoring
- Sending a signal that MDGs are achievable locally
- Goals localised and adapted to the village context
- Involvement of local partners, community members, and close collaboration with government programmes
- Self-help approach to enable people to lead a life of dignity, justice and freedom from hunger and poverty

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Songha identified rice cultivation using the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) system and water harvesting as important factors that will contribute to reducing poverty and hunger. The SRI technique of paddy cultivation is especially suitable for drought-prone areas. With minimal external inputs and a slight change in the planting method, output almost doubled, as demonstrated in experimental plots. Consequently the number of farmers practicing SRI has increased from four in 2006 to nearly 200 today. Sarwan, on the other hand, focuses on livelihood generation and convergence with different government programmes such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, National Rural Health Mission and Total Literacy Campaign for addressing MDGs 1, 2, and 3. Both Millennium Villages have extensively used the local cultural media

of music and folk dance to communicate the MDG concept.

The monitoring process is being further localised over time by enhancing the capacities of villagers to monitor their own progress in development. The ripple effect of the Millennium initiative is slowly spreading from the project area to other organisations, to government, and also to banking institutions, which are realising the potential of partnering in this initiative.

■ Achievements

In an advocacy workshop on MDGs with senior government officials, the speaker of the Jharkhand State assembly admitted that poverty and social development schemes had failed to reach out

to the people and that perhaps it is now time for the people to reach out for their rightful entitlements.

Progress has evidently been made in the villages, and the monitoring indicators speak for themselves: currently nearly 65 percent of the married young women are over 18 years of age; more than 90 percent of pregnant women are over 20 years of age; nearly 80 percent of children are fully immunised, around 54 percent of the children have overcome malnutrition, and over half the population has access to government schemes related to housing, food security and a midday meal. Although there is a long way to go, these positive signs offer a glimmer of hope for development work.

Zusammenfassung

Sarwan und Gandhiji Songha in den Bundesstaaten Jharkhand und West-Bengalen wurden von der Welthungerhilfe 2006 zusammen mit 13 anderen Dörfern in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika zu „Millennium Villages“ deklariert. Trotz sehr schlechter sozialer Indikatoren wurden sie zu einem Testfall für das Erreichen der Millenniumsentwicklungsziele (MDGs). Sie sind Beispiele dafür, welche Veränderungen mit der Unterstützung und Beteiligung der lokalen Bevölkerung erzielt werden können. Der Artikel zeigt, wie die beiden Dörfer nach wie vor die MDGs stützen und zu einem Musterbeispiel für künftige Vorhaben geworden sind.

Resumen

En 2006, la organización Agro Acción Alemana (Welthungerhilfe) adoptó a Sarwan y Gandhiji Songha, en los estados indios de Jharkhand y Bengala Occidental respectivamente, al igual que a otras 13 aldeas en África, Asia y América Latina como “aldeas del milenio”. Dados sus desastrosos indicadores sociales, estas localidades se convirtieron en casos de ensayo para el logro de los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio (ODM). Mientras tanto, son un ejemplo de los cambios que puede lograr una intervención eficaz llevada a cabo con el consentimiento y la participación de la población local. El artículo detalla el compromiso de ambas aldeas con los ODM y ofrece recomendaciones para estrategias futuras de acción.



Photo: Welthungerhilfe

Progress in the villages is evident, particularly among women. Most are older than 18-20 years of age when they marry and have children and now have an opportunity to earn their own living.