A Field Worker's Diary - Part 15

It was the year 2002; we had recently joined as Community Coordinators (CCs) in the Andhra Pradesh Rural Poverty Reduction Project (APRPRP - Velugu) which was started for poverty elimination by the Andhra Pradesh Government with funding support from World Bank. As our primary goal was poverty reduction, our first assignment on joining was to identify poor families in villages of Guntur district and form Self-help Groups (SHGs) with the poor women. The Project was based on the principle that the process of identification of the poor must be done with the help of people's participation, so we received training on Participatory Identification of the Poor (PIP) framework.

After completing the training, we formed into small teams and went to villages assigned to us and used the PIP framework to identify and list poor people and poorest of the poor people in the villages. Because the Project's beneficiaries were selected on the basis of this list, preparing it was not only a critical aspect of the Project, but a tough task as well.

Firstly, as it was essentially a people's participatory exercise, we had to hold these meetings during nighttime when all the villagers had a little leisure time to gather together. Before the meetings, we had to make sure to spread the news about the meetings to all households in each village so that as many people as possible could attend it. No one who hadn't been there cannot imagine the lengths we had to go through to bring all the villagers for the village-level meeting.

After assembling them, we had to start preparing a social map of the village based on their inputs. Starting from a house near the area we stood, we asked villagers about who stayed in the nearest house, what sort of house was it, and created a *Muggu* of it, and then proceeded to the next one. In this way, we drew everything from each house, each road, to even each community building on the ground. After completing the *map*, we started the actual process of identification. We asked everybody what according to them were the criteria for identifying someone as poorest of the poor, and they replied their notions; which were very interesting. We listed all the answers they had given on a chart and asked them if they thought of anybody fitting these criteria in their village and asked them to list them. In this way, we prepared a list of the poorest of the poor in the village. In the same way, we asked the villagers what according to them were the criteria for identifying someone as poor, and based on their answers we listed the poor people in the

villages. Next, we used to ask people to identify every house in the map and make them categorize the households into poorest of the poor, poor, middle class, rich household. By the time we finished this process, it would be midnight or later.

Then, after sending all the villagers home, we proceeded to our next task - copying the social map drawn on the road onto a chart and then preparing the final list of poor based on that. I can't even remember how many days I spent lying down on the ground in some far-off village in the middle of the night beside the drawing on the road and copying it onto a chart; It used to seem like a pretty fun activity at that time.

Somehow, neither I nor my colleagues ever thought of those days as straining or risky as we were passionate about what we were doing. We knew each and every family in the villages that we implemented PIP in. And, even though the villagers didn't know what we were doing, what our purpose was and whether it would be beneficial for them, they were concerned for us as we were working so hard, late in the night, far from our native places, so they kept sending us tea, food and took great care of us...

I still remember vividly some of the answers that we got when we asked people who they thought were the poorest of the poor -

- Those without houses or assets or those having small huts.
- Those who can afford food only once a day.
- Those who can't afford to buy medicines.
- Those without any agricultural land.
- Those who can't send their children to schools

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