

### **A Field Worker's Diary - Part 34**

While I was working in the Andhra Pradesh Rural Poverty Reduction Project (APRPRP) in Bellamkonda, Krosuru, Achampeta, Rajupalem mandals in Guntur district, I used to stay in Bellamkonda mandal and shuttle between the mandals. Maoists used to be pretty active in Bellamkonda in those days. Being a forest area and the ease of travelling to Krishna district by just crossing the Krishna river, etc., have made villages adjoining Krishna river into a beehive of Maoist activities. On the other hand, police combing was also widespread.

Once the evening fell, police used to form into teams and start combing operations across the mandal. Krosuru mandal adjoined Bellamkonda mandal. Naxal activity was quite visible in some of the villages in that mandal as well. The police had information that the youth in the area were getting attracted to Maoist movement. Maybe because those areas were risk-prone, senior officials never worked there. But the sub-inspectors (SI) who were new at the force used to work really actively. Take the example of the then-newly-joined Krosuru SI, who had an idea to combat the naxal problem. Thinking that most of the youth from the poor households were the ones getting attracted towards the Maoist movement, he put forth the idea that we should provide those youth and their families with proper employment opportunities so that they don't join the extremist movement. Therefore, he started working with various departments to find ways to provide employment opportunities to them. By that time we had already started joining women from poor households into Self Help Groups (SHGs) and facilitated loans for income generation activities through Bank linkage. However, as most of the loans were being used by the women for household needs, the SI head put a proposal before us: he wanted us to provide skill training to these women and then facilitate loans so that they can improve their income through those livelihoods. With the permission of our project director, we told our community coordinator Sunita to take the list of households from the police department and interact with the woman from those households and find out what sort of skill training they would be interested in and what we could do to help them. Sunita and the police together went and spoke to many women and found that they were interested in works that can be taken up from their own houses such as tailoring, embroidery, saree painting etc. After counting the number of people who wanted to learn different types of skills, how much would it cost for the training, what sort of help would they need to convert that skill into a livelihood, how much would it cost for that, etc., we

created a proposal. By the time we had sent our proposal to our project head office, naxals had bombed a government office in Bellamkonda mandal. Under those circumstances, our project director must have thought that it would be risky to take up such a project in the area. He had put the proposal on hold and said that we will think about it later. In this way, the project we had wanted to do had come to an end even before we could start it; but, with the marriage of our Sunita and the new SI, their love story witnessed a happy ending.

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