

These Indian villagers no longer head for cities

We have read it in books and seen it in movies so many times — the scene of a simple village boy packing his bags to leave for the city in search of a better life. But in some parts of the sprawling central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, that is not quite the story.

The District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP) has given renewed hope to youth in 14 backward districts of the state and brought down migration rate by nearly 20 percent in six years. Run by the State Government and funded by the World Bank, the project provides a means of livelihood to people living in interior villages. Six years after its implementation, the results have started showing an impact. One of the more prominent achievements, perhaps, is that the migration rate has come down.

“Earlier one didn’t have much of a choice if one decided to stay back in the village. Farming was what most usually had to resort to. But since youths wanted to achieve more, earn more, they usually went the city way. But after this project started about two years ago, there are a lot more choices...”

“One can learn the skills of almost anything of their choice, be it carpentry, bicycle and rickshaw repairing, operating a rice and flour mill and making carpets and shoes, besides others, and use these to earn his living,” said Ram Kailash, one of the farmers of Nalajhiri village.

Biswajeet Sen of the World Bank, who looks after the DPIP programme in Madhya Pradesh, said the project is not supply-based, but demand-based. “The project is demand-based, not supply-based. For instance, we won’t give cattle to a person and ask him to start dairy farming if he is not interested and feels that he won’t benefit



Some of the newly trained rural women in a village in Madhya Pradesh

from it. “We help people through a number of community interest groups (CIGs) involved in different skills, both in the farm and non-farm sector, depending on their interest,” Sen said.

A survey in 2,902 villages in the 14 districts where DPIP has been implemented since 2002 revealed that there has been a 65 percent increase in the family income of all CIG households.

“The figures are excellent. In agriculture, for instance, after we intervened and helped them set up more wells and tube wells for better irrigation purposes, there has been a 15 percent increase in the total irrigated land in the state. This has resulted in a 93 percent increase in the value of agricultural production in terms of rupee per acre. In terms of income, there has been an increase of 66 percent in CIG households,” Sen said.

In animal husbandry, the CIG households have seen an increase of 158 percent in income, in poultry and pig and goat rearing

there is an increase of 19 percent and in non-farm sector four percent.

“With an increase in income, we are now capable of spending more as well. We can spend on our children’s education, health and in other household expenditures. We have also started saving... This has greatly benefited us because we no longer depend on the moneylender,” said Lekha Bharadwaj, a woman in the village.

Bharadwaj is, in fact, now secretary of the Village Development Committee (VDC) that lends money to the villagers.

“We lend out a particular amount of money after asking the reason and then getting the signature of the person that the money will be returned within a particular period and on an interest of 1.5 percent.

“This is much better than going to the local moneylender who charges a higher interest rate,” she said. With the money collected from the interest thus paid, the committee does various things for the benefit of the village. For instance, the committee got a team of doctors from Bhopal when there was an outbreak of malaria in the village.

If there are still people who want to go to the city despite the positive changes and the decline in migration from 30 percent to 14 percent, project officers ensure that they don’t go there without honing a skill.

“Instead of going to the city and remaining unemployed, it’s much better that they learn something and then go there. That’s why we also started training people in other skills that will help them get jobs as security guards, cooks, domestic servants or waiters in the hotel industry,” added Sen. The total outlay for the project is Rs.5.21 billion. ■

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India is willing to take on any appropriate supportive role in the regional cooperation process in the context of Afghanistan’s reconstruction. India also welcomes the decision to make regional economic cooperation the main focus of the next meeting of the JCMB next month in Kabul.

An effective national communications and public outreach strategy, to which the Afghan government already attaches high priority, remains a compelling policy element. This will involve creation of the appropriate sup-

port infrastructure and dissemination systems, to reach out to the people at the sub-national levels.

This will not only assuage overloaded public expectations, but also help mainstream the provinces into the national polity, which is one of the key objectives of the JCMB platform.

Excellencies, ultimately, all the different political and developmental processes in place in Afghanistan must be “Afghanised”, with Afghan-led identification and prioritisation of projects, implementation, ownership

and management. At the same time, there is a need for a realistic assessment of key needs and capacity impacts, clearer prioritisation and costing of projects, due focus on infrastructure, capacity building, anti-corruption efforts, improved information sharing as well as greater donor coordination.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate India’s continued commitment to partner the government and the people of Afghanistan, as well as the international community, in the socioeconomic uplift of Afghanistan, for peace and stability of the region.