

I. Winning over darkness

Tentuliguda is a small village with a population of 180 people and 48 households, under the jurisdiction of Koraput block of Dumuripadar Gram Panchayat. Geographically, it is located in the uppermost portion of Dermal mountain range and is one of the most inaccessible areas of the Block. The population depends on agriculture which is the main source of their income. However agriculture is seasonal and during non farming season, they are often employed as daily wage earners. Most of the villagers prefer to migrate to nearby towns in search of livelihood. Due to its inaccessibility, most of the government's development programmes meant for rural and tribal people does not reach the village.

Until recently, there was no provision of electricity in the village. Since ages, villagers used to live in the dark and thereby they were habituated of darkness. Gradually the villagers felt the necessity and importance of light in their lives and thought of getting electricity to the village.

A local VSO volunteer was deputed in the village and after initial discussion with the volunteer, villagers decided to raise the point of electrification in the Panchayat. One day villagers approached the Sarpanch of the Panchayat and apprised him of the prevailing situation in Tentuliguda village. The Sarpanch assured them that the electrification will be done soon but nothing happened. Villagers kept following up with the Sarpanch, but all their efforts turned futile.

One day the village representatives visited the Executive Engineer's office at Similiguda to enquire about the matter. Surprisingly, they came to know from the Engineer that the village Tentuliguda is already electrified. It was a big joke for all of them and they realised that how badly the official system is working. They came back to the village with sheer disappointment.

They met with the VSO India volunteer and apprised him of the situation. The volunteer explained them about the existence of a unique grievance redressal platform, Samadhan and suggested them to lodge their grievance on the platform. Following his instructions, the villagers formally lodged their grievances in Samadhan platform by sending an SMS to the mobile helpline number 9437582015 on October 21, 2012. The volunteer further advised the villagers to meet the District Collector (DC) in this regard. On October 29, 2012 about 20 villagers from Tentuliguda along with the volunteer went to meet the District Collector at the Monday Grievance Cell. They shared their problems with the Collector and demanded electrification in the village. The Collector listened to them patiently and after realising the sensitivity of the issue decided to handle the matter on his own. He shared with the villagers about Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojna (RGGVY) and promised them to provide electricity under RGGVY. Villagers returned to their village with a ray of hope and smile on their faces.

The DC then had a meeting with his officials to look into the matter. The Junior Engineer (JE) of Damanjodi inspected the village and recommended for installation of 25 electric poles in order to provide electricity in the village. The JE submitted a detailed feasibility report and after receiving the report, a high level committee led by the District Collector decided to visit the place. On November 09, 2012 the committee visited Tentuliguda village. Based on the JE's Report and with the recommendation of the Committee, the electrification work of the village has been sanctioned and initiated.



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II. Equality and disability

Phampuni, a village in Phampuni Gram Panchayat in Jeypore Block of Koraput District has a total population of 4,227 people with 903 households. In this village, lives a small family of seven year old Rudra Rauto and his parents. Rudra is hearing and speech impaired since birth. His parents initially neglected his disability. They took him once or twice to the doctor for check up, but never followed doctor's advice. They believed that the Rudra had a minor problem and expected that as time passes, Rudra will start to speak and hear but that never happened.

Rudra's parents met a VSO community volunteer in one of the panchayat meetings and urged him to help them with their child. Following the volunteer's advice, Rudra's parents met the Additional District Medical Officer (ADMO), who was present at the Monday Grievance Cell. The ADMO examined the child and said that treatment at that stage was not possible. However, he suggested them to apply for the Disability Certificate for Rudra to avail Disable Pension Benefits. He further recommended sending Rudra to the school for hearing and speech impaired at Sunabeda. He shared that the school is for children with disabilities and Rudra will get free education, food, books and other amenities needed for his overall development. Few days later Rudra's parents visited the school. The Principal assured them that proper care of the child will be taken.

Rudra's parents finally decided to admit him in the school for a better life.

Nelakantha Mandal also resides in the same village with his wife, two daughters and a son. Nelakantha is physically disabled wheelchair user. He lost both his legs due to some unknown disease.

Though he was entitled to and applied for disability pension with supporting documents at block office, he did not receive it. And being physically disabled, it was quite difficult for him to go to the block office and regularly follow up on the matter. Despite this, he however went to the block office seven times. Each time, the concerned officials used to give him lame excuses. Nelakantha was extremely disappointed and did not know what to do.

Nelkantha got to know about the Samadhan platform and met a VSO volunteer. He shared his entire grievance with the volunteer who listened to him patiently. The volunteer advised Nelkantha to lodge an official complaint in Samadhan. Nelakantha formally lodged the complaint through SMS to the number 9437582015 on 13th October 2012. He immediately received his Complaint ID after acknowledgement of the complaint. He was further advised to meet the District Collector (DC) at Monday grievance cell .

On 26th November 2012, Nelakanth accompanied by the volunteer met with the District Collector and quoted his complaint ID. Nelakanth apprised the DC and requested him to take prompt action in this regard. The DC immediately forwarded the case to District Welfare Officer (DWO) and assured Nelkantha that he will get his pension soon.

DWO enquired the matter and instructed the concerned officials to sanction Nelkantha's disability pension. With the support of Samadhan, Nelkantha is now realising his right of receiving his pension.

III. Making government processes transparent

Sadan Krishani, a 29-year-old daily labourer lives with his wife and son in Chakarliguda village in Koraput, a tribal-populated remote district in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, where Samadhan has been piloted. He was intrigued when a community volunteer trained by a local NGO partner, SOVA, came to his village to talk about a completely new way of registering grievances with the government. The prospect of filing a complaint via SMS that he could track and see on the internet seemed to him the only remaining chance to receive his outstanding wages. When he couldn't find any other work he had applied for a MGNREGA job and had worked 15 days (at a minimum wage of Rupees 100 per day or approx. USD 2) under the scheme. Despite his efforts to chase the payment for this work by complaining to Block Development officials and the Sarpanch (elected head) of the village, the wages amounting hadn't been paid for more than four months. The missing money weakened them financially to the extent that they were unable to afford nutritious food for the family.

As fortune would have it, Sadan was identified by the SOVA team as a potential candidate to lodge the first complaint on Samadhan during the formal launch ceremony on August 26th, 2011, inaugurated by the State Chief Minister. It was a courageous decision to lodge the complaint publicly but Sadan agreed to do so put more pressure on the government. His identity was protected under a proxy name for the launch and is still protected. When he approached the local government officials shortly after the event he was told the grievance was now handled at district level and would be resolved within five days. This proved to be the case and after more than four months Sadan finally received the wages he had been owed for so long. After covering their family needs, he and his wife were able to invest a small proportion hoping to set them up for a more secure future.

Encouraged by this success, Sadan and the Samadhan volunteers jointly educated the villagers of Chakarliguda on various government schemes and the grievance mechanisms available to them. With their newly gained understanding the villagers realised that 25 of them were owed MGNREGA wages for eight days' work each. In September 2011 they decided to attend a Saturday Grievance Cell and lodge the complaint directly with the District Collector (as the Samadhan process wasn't fully integrated into government processes at the time although its trained volunteer cadre was campaigning and generating awareness of basic entitlements among citizens). They also informed the Sarpanch and the Block Development Officer (BDO). An enquiry under the supervision of the District Collector (District Administrative Head and a civil servant) was carried out and 20 villagers received their wages. The money owed to the remaining villagers was released at a later point in time when they had completed more work. The joint success was celebrated and the villagers encouraged Sadan, the SOVA staff and Samadhan volunteers to continue educating others on their basic entitlements.

It was such a regular awareness raising programme that brought to light that BD officials had misused a total of Rupees 80,000 (approx. USD 1,440) belonging to six members of different villages in Koraput. In a similar way to the above example, the villagers came together and shared the complaint with the Sarpanch and relevant administrative officials (BDO, District Collector) and even with elected representatives such as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and a Member of Parliament (MP) and lodged it at a Saturday Grievance Cell, the government's existing traditional complaint mechanism. The District Collector immediately ordered the vigilance department to look into this matter. The allegations were found to be true and the officials were brought to account. The amount of Rupees 80,000 was distributed to the six villagers. Looking back at the events Sadan says: "SOVA staff and

Samadhan volunteers have always been willing to help. The implementation of Samadhan has strengthened our ability to make the government more transparent.”

IV. A new beginning

Village Guali is in Kotpad block with a total population of 300 people and 45 households. On one fateful day in the month of May 2012, the village accidentally caught fire. The gravity of the accident was so high that the fire speeded and burnt 23 houses into ashes. These 23 families lost everything they had. Block administration rushed to the village and immediately provided some relief materials. The 23 affected families made temporary accommodation to survive, however the received from district administration was not sufficient to support them.

The affected families approached the Block Development Officer (BDO) on numerous occasions requesting them to allot houses under Indira Awas Yojna or Mo-Kudia scheme but to no avail. They got to know about the Samadhan portal through a VSO volunteer working in the village. The volunteer counseled them and advised to lodge complaints through Samadhan grievance redressal system. Following the volunteers advice, the 23 affected families lodged complaints on 17th July 2012 mobile. Immediately they received their complaint ID mentioning that their grievance will be looked into by the appropriate department.

Further, the representatives of the families also went on to meet the District Collector at Monday Grievance Cell on 3rd December 2012. They shared their ordeal with the Collector urging him to take immediate action. The Collector forwarded the case to Programme Director (PD), District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and instructed him to look into the matter. Later PD, DRDA examined the matter and suggested that Mo-Kudia can be granted. The representatives then came back with an assurance to get their houses.

Thereafter, PD DRDA with the support of Jeypore sub collector, made an enquiry into the complete incident. A month later, he received the final report from Sub Collector, Jeypore. He studied the complete report and sanctioned 23 houses under Mo-kudia scheme. Today, all affected families are happy and content. They believe that Samadhan has given them a new beginning in life.

Apart from these, there are many more stories of transparency, empowerment and change sparked by Samadhan.

V. Regularised working hours of village nutrition centre

Daily wage earners Laxman Saunta and wife Daimoti Saunta from Kathapada village in Koraput District got to know about Samadhan through the support of a VSO community volunteer. They registered a complaint on January 13, 2012 via SMS against the Aanganwadi Worker who did not attend the centre regularly or take proper care of their four year old daughter Saita and other village children. The District Administration of Koraput processed their grievance through the proper channels and instructed the

Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) department to look into the matter and resolve the issue promptly. Having investigated the complaint, the ICDS department issued a notice to the AWW concerned to attend her work regularly and do justice to the role and responsibilities entrusted upon her.

VI. Allotment of financial assistance under housing scheme to Below Poverty Line (BPL) households

Arath Takri, who is 31-year-old lives with his wife, Sunita, in Tayaput village, Laxmipur Block of Koraput District. During the Palli Sabha (village meeting), his name was selected as one of the beneficiaries of the Indira Awas Yojna – a government housing scheme for BPL populations in rural India. He was very pleased and excited after hearing the news that he was entitled to financial assistance to construct a house under the scheme, but his happiness was short-lived. He found that his name had been mysteriously replaced (at the Block level) and another person of his village had been nominated to avail the same benefit. On formally lodging a complaint via SMS, his grievance reached the District Administration directly and was forwarded to the concerned department, District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). Soon after, a proper inquiry was set up by the DRDA and the decision was notified. Arath is now entitled to financial assistance to construct a house in his name.

VII. Setting up of a primary school

Sibaram Bandhia, aged 35 lives in the Bandhia Guda village of Koraput District. The village has 56 households with a population of 267. Out of the entire population, 43 are children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. There is no primary school in the village to provide basic and elementary education to these children. The nearest primary school is located 2 kilometres away in a neighbouring village. A stream flows between the two villages which the children from Bandhia Guda have to cross on their way to school. This presents many difficulties to the children trying to attend school, particularly on rainy days.

The villagers of Bandhia Guda village discussed in their community meeting and decided unanimously to use Samadhan in the hope their complaint would finally be redressed. In November 2011, they formally registered their grievance through the Samadhan helpline number popularised by through SOVA/VSO India's trained community volunteers. The complaint reached the District Administration directly. The matter was transferred to the District Primary Education Department (DPED), who studied their grievance with utmost importance. After giving it due consideration, the DPED department gave approval and sanctioned the project to start a primary school in Bandhia Guda village.
