



# **KHOJ**

## **REPORT 2010-2011**

*We take this opportunity to share with you some of the developments of our work in the last two years, several of which have been very satisfying and revealing in the journey of ensuring Justice to the people residing in the hills and forests of Melghat and adjoining areas of Amravati district of Maharashtra.*

*It has been 15 years of our work in Melghat and looking back, it seems that this was quite recent that we decided to locate ourselves here at the foothills of the Satpuda Mountain Ranges in the Central India.*

*While the focus of the efforts continues to be on education, health and livelihoods, yet the approaches were new and defining.*

*Our interface with the Judiciary also revealed to us the Sensitivity with which they looked towards the people's issues that's becoming rare and hence cherished in the struggle for Justice.*

*People's participation, people's struggle's that have ushered in empowerment that brought in changes, work with some positive and passionate Officers from administration helped make the programmes, laws and schemes more accessible and meaningful to people.*

*While it has been a constant struggle to enrich and empower the lives for whom this process began, yet slowly it seems that the people are moving towards taking charge of their situation. This has also meant that there is increased opposition, pressure from those whose vested interests are being hurt including corrupt contractors, dealers, politicians and some others who guise themselves as pro people while in reality are those who have used the programmes, policies and benefits meant for the people to their own development. We have also been forced into litigations by several such people which are currently in court and we hope that Justice and Fair Trial shall prevail over the attempts to malign our work, our reputation and demoralize the public support for the work being done in the region to ensure better and dignified life for those who are impoverished in the name of Development.*

*While we share with you the work of the Institution, we also thank you for standing by us and supporting us all through these years and for your faith and trust that keeps us moving through the toughest challenges on the ground here.*

## Introduction –

KHOJ began its journey in Melghat in 1996 and our initial work and stay with the people gave us a strong base and understanding for our work in the region.

Melghat a hugely forested area has been known for its Tigers and coincidentally also for high under nutrition, infant and maternal mortality in the last two to three decades.

The region inhabiting over 300,000 people as per the last census of 2011 predominantly is a home to the Korku tribes who form over 75% of the population.

The population is quiet, law abiding, honest and hardworking and has been closely associated with the labour work in the forests of Melghat traditionally. While agriculture has been a major occupation, the yield is poor due to the hilly and rough terrain. Hence, labour activities support the primary occupation.

The disruption of the traditional sources of food and medicines based on forest and wildlife due to the depletion of forests, the restrictions of the laws and the lack of enough alternative sources created a transitional paucity of nutrition and medicine which was easily derived from the forests. Under nutrition seems to be a phenomenon of this period as it has not been written or reported in any previous documents.

On this background, we began our journey. Our experiences and analysis of the life of Melghat pointed to the vicious cycle in which the people were getting trapped year after year.

We identified Education, Health and Livelihood as the three broad areas of intervention along with sharing of information, working on transport and communication.

We began with the vision of Empowering the village Gram Sabha's (collective body of all elderly people above the age of 18 years of a village recognized by the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Area Act 1996) to take decisions on the development pertaining to the development of village.

It is in this direction that our efforts have moved utilizing the legal provisions and programmes that empowers the communities in this direction, be it the implementation of the Recognition of the Forest Rights Act, NREGA or the Community based monitoring of health services under the National flagship programmed of National Rural Health Mission.

Our constant engagement with adolescent girls and youths in nurturing their skills and enhancing their information and knowledge from self to community has also brought to the organisation the freshness of thoughts and ideas and is helping us look at the village situation with a different perspective and increased energy levels.

The partnership with Government which had led to emergence of some local interventions got a set back with change in administration and emergence of corrupt tendencies that led into a legal re course to Justice. Our interface with Judiciary during this process has revealed to us the beauty of the Judicial Process in ensuring fair process of law and Justice to the victims.

The education system in the region is a cause for concerns as it is leaving youths at cross roads because of the poor quality, inadequate teaching and learning facilities and efforts that do not link them to any direct vocation, occupation or use the knowledge in their local context and thus is creating a force of youths who are educated but do not know what to do with this education. This is also probably a reflection of the flawed system that is not able to address local needs and resources and lacks in-depth knowledge, skills and attitude building that empower the students. This remains a challenge yet to be addressed in its entirety.

The details of the programmes undertaken in the course o two years are outlined below as some of the initiatives during this period.

### **Initiatives –**

## **LIVELIHOOD RIGHTS**

### **a. IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREST RIGHTS ACT**

Recognition of Forest Rights Act 2006 has been one of the prime legislation in the country that has set out to undo the historical injustice done to the tribals.

The act recognizes the rights of the tribal's and other forest dwelling communities over the forest land they have tilled before 13<sup>th</sup> December 2005 and have control over the same as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007.

The other beautiful part of the act is the fact that it not only recognized the individual association of the tribal's with forest but also has a provision to approve the traditional rights of the community over the forest resources like that of nistar, fishing, fuel or fodder etc.

However there is a great apathy in the implementation of the community rights. A reason for this was the complex nature of the claim making process as well as the process of mobilizing the community and collecting evidences. The Forest Rights Committees at the village level were given one day training on the implementation process. However this was not sufficient to facilitate the process at the village level.

While the second part of the Act was the most essential aspect as it provided community rights over the forest resources yet those implemented first in the district of Amravati were the provisions of the Individual rights since they resulted into individual tangible benefits.



Gram Sabha at Paivihir to discuss FRA Claim

It was in 2007, that we first initiated the struggle to demand the implementation of the Community Forest Rights. During the last two years, we have worked with 40 Village Forest Rights Committees to educate them about the Community Forest Rights and have managed to file over 14 claims while 5 others are in process.

Over 180 individual claims have been recognized while over 160 claims have been in process at various levels.

## b. IMPLEMENTATION OF NREGA

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been another milestone legislation that aims at ensuring livelihood opportunities to the rural and tribal population in the country for a period of 100 days.

In Maharashtra, with the merger of the Employment Guarantee Scheme and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, there is a round the year guarantee, however this is still not the reality. People from Melghat are still forced to migrate in search of employment in large numbers. On this background, we have worked with the District Administration in trying to ensure that the programme reaches the people of Melghat and provides them with employment opportunities while concurrently working with the village communities in increasing their awareness of the provisions of the act and its use in creating and strengthening the village level assets. In the last two years, persistence efforts and follow up have yielded good results in our focus area, however, overall in Melghat a lot still remains to be achieved for NREGA to become the lifeline for people.

KHOJ along with other organizations of Melghat, had collectively also been part of the information sharing and awareness programmes on MREGA in Melghat that facilitated special Gram Sabha's on MREGA focusing on the demand and nature of work that could be undertaken in the villages as well as working on resolving bottlenecks in the implementation of the programme like the delay in payment of wages that has been evolved and addressed over the two years collectively. A total of over 2.5 crores of rupees has been generated as wages under NREGA.

	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>Amount of wages received (approximate)</b>
<b>Achalpur</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>166425</b>
<b>Chikhaldara</b>	<b>155990</b>	<b>16378950</b>
<b>Dharni</b>	<b>7022</b>	<b>737310</b>

(Data sourced from [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in))

### c. FOOD FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Food for Community Development Programme has been an intervention that has helped us demonstrate various models of soil and water conservation work across Melghat. Supported by CASA this programme also serves as a STOP GAP programme between the initiation of MREGA work and the people's need to earn a livelihood.

Under this work we have been able to create effective structures like Farm Ponds, Loose Boulder Structures in farms of the village people.

During the year 157 men and 366 women worked on the sites in the 6 villages while in 2011, we



Farm pond created under FFCD programme at Jaitadehi

People working on FFCD site at Lawada



have been able to create livelihood opportunities for 386 people giving them on an average of 10 days of work each. These people receive 6 kgs. of wheat per day in compensation of their work. 124 men and 262 women were employed under the work. Sustainable soil and water conservation structures were created during this period that have increased the water table and thus the availability of drinking water as well.

## HEALTH RIGHTS

### a. COMMUNITY BASED MONITORING OF HEALTH SERVICES

Community Based Monitoring of Health Services under NRHM is an innovative effort to increase people's participation in the monitoring of the services provided by the health institutions. Led by Sathi from Pune as the State Nodal Agency, this programme is being implemented in the districts with predominant tribal population of the State. KHOJ is the nodal agency coordinating the work in Amravati district.



Tribal Women get an opportunity to explore the issues of health

As an effort to highlight the problems, concerns and recommendations of the people about the health services, a process of data gathering, analysis is carried out in the villages, public health centre's, rural hospitals.

A report card is prepared based on the data generated that highlights the status of health services in the respective staff and their institutions.

A Public Hearing is organised at PHC/ Block and District level to bring the local situation to the knowledge and action of the officials.

**BDO Chikhaldara addressing Jan Sunwai**



In Amravati district, this programme is carried out in 5 blocks of Chikhaldara, Dharni, Achalpur, Chandur Bazar and Anjangaon with support of 2 other partner organisations.

Over the last 2 years, this programme has taken the provisions of NRHM to the people of the intervention villages thereby developing their capacities to access the health services.

Programmes like Public Hearings give an opportunity to the people of the villages to share their learning's and experiences with the administration and policy makers to improve their health delivery system.

The major impact of the programme has been the awareness created amongst people and increased the people's access to health services, which in turn resulted in some improvement in service delivery.

#### **b. ADOLESCENT GIRLS PROGRAMME – GIRLS GAINING GROUND**

A programme to empower adolescent girls with life skills training coupled with health and nutrition information has been undertaken with support of Bhavishya Alliance, Mumbai. The programme has helped us reach over 1000 girls in communities and Ashram schools of Melghat.

This programme was directed towards ensuring that the girls had complete knowledge about their health, nutrition, body, age at marriage, decision to marry

and their capacity to dialogue and communicate on issues related to these within their families.

The programme was facilitated in the villages and the schools through village level Girls who facilitated the processes after extensive rounds of trainings and follow ups.

The programme was followed up with a programme to provide vocational training to girls in which over 30 girls received training in basic fashion designing. Out of these 15 girls are today earning their own livelihood based on the training.

Many more girls are facilitating the processes are at village level in trying to bring the information and knowledge about the Government schemes and programmes through village information centre's.

### **c. BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION TO ADDRESS MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH ISSUES**

In order to make the communities more aware about the situations that cause maternal and child mortality and lead to high rate of under nourishment, we are

Street Theatre performance in village



undertaking a Behavior Change intervention with communities of 10 villages in Melghat, wherein some key issues would be addressed using participatory communication along with counseling of mothers and pregnant women and their families on Ante natal and post natal care.

We already had a group of girls who were trained in life skills, health, and nutrition and participatory communication who are now a part of the Street theatre group.



BCC Sessions with Women facilitated by girls

The Street Theatre performance was followed by one to one Counseling of the women and their family members.

Performances were conducted on issues of safe delivery, Comprehensive Ante Natal Care and Complementary Feeding of children in the villages. The response from the communities is quite motivating as women, men and children gather to

see the performances and a dialogue that follows the performance. The challenge is to keep the girls group together given the pressures from home and families

about engaging in such performances that require hectic travelling. This programme has been supported by Narotam Sekhsaria Foundation, Mumbai

#### **d. COUNSELOR PROGRAMME AT THE PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS AND THE MELGHAT CASE IN HIGH COURT**

Counselors Programme was a district level initiative to depute local Korku speaking girls and boys from Melghat in the Health institutions through a Government Civil Society Partnership in order to bridge the communication gap.

Twenty Eight, (28) Counselors were appointed in this process in the year 2007 with support of NRHM funds. This programme was abruptly terminated by the District Administration on 1st February 2010.

On 4th February 2010, there was an advertisement in the newspaper that called for applications for the post of Counselors by the Zilla Parishad. The criterion was 12th pass. Many of the Counselors working in the Health Institutions were not 12th pass. However they had undergone several rounds of training and performed well in their jobs.

Several applications, protests and delegations to the District administration did not bring Justice to the Counselor's ousted from their positions.

In a last bit effort to seek Justice, we had faxed a letter to the Hon. High Court, Mumbai stating the lack of reasons for discontinuation of the programme and the injustice done to the Counselors.

This letter was accepted by the Hon. High Court as a Suo Moto Petition and in the hearing on 7th May 2010; we got a stay on the new recruitment process and continuation of the 22 Counselors already trained.

Over the next hearings apart from the reinstatement of the 22 Counselors, another 12 Counselors have been appointed as per the orders of the earlier CEO and this programme has been extended to cover the referral institutions of Achalpur and Amravati. During the hearings that have followed other issues related to health in Melghat came up as a result of the information filed on behalf of the respondents—Additional Chief Secretary, Health, Maharashtra.

Child Treatment Centre's (CTC) and Village Child Development Camps (VCDC) which ensured that under nourished children were treated through a Special Nutritional Protocol for a period of 21 days was found to be missing despite highly positive impacts.

With the adoption of the new WHO protocol for measurement of under nutrition, the number of children in Moderate and Severe under nutrition has increase substantially. Melghat has also witnessed over 213 Child Deaths in the months of August to October 2010 and over 70%of these deaths were from moderately and severely under nourished categories.CTC and VCDC have been initiated as a result of the Court Orders across the State.

A detailed recommendation to ensure reduction of under nutrition and effective health and livelihoods has been submitted to the Hon. High Court. The matter continues to be heard in the High Court at Mumbai.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING

YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME was an initiative designed to reach out to the youths of Melghat and Achalpur region of Amravati district.

It was an exploration of programmes that would address the challenges of the tribal societies. The programme was an opportunity to youths to understand the development paradigm, the efforts made by various groups of people living in similar situations, understand the policy framework and use all these for the benefit of our people wherever possible.

A 4 month programme then planned based on the needs of the youths gave the opportunity to focus their energies on the above processes.

The four months period was spent by the participants undergoing theory sessions, practical field based learning's, earning new knowledge and gaining new skills, participating in various events that raised people's genuine demands and issues from the region of Melghat and Achalpur.



Over this period, there was gradual team building, mutual learning and sharing.

There was exploration of self, of society. The process raised questions, understood possible remedies.

The team of 7 boys and 3 girls spend the 4 months amicably and demonstrated great potential to contribute to society through different ways.



Sudhiya leading the Rally with women

This 4 month period also brought to us some mixed experiences of the youths of Melghat like –

- youths constantly faced some medical challenge and this posed to us the question if this was a result of being undernourished at an early age
- Most of them had beautiful handwriting
- They were sensitive, sincere and honest

During the 4 months training, there were many workshop organised like that of communication skills, street theatre, gender, soil and water conservation work, RTI in which the youths from the first phase also participated.

The confidence, communication skills, understanding of the youths increased over the period and this was demonstrated when they performed some street theatre shows. They participated in demonstration, participated in games and won prizes and contributed to the collective events organized for ensuring the rights of people for their employment, forest rights and other similar issues.

*Nishikant from AID John Hopkins University Chapter visited KHOJ and he wrote about his observation of the training session being conducted for the youths on his blog -“ I went upstairs where the youth were having a leadership skill training. The topic was the famous mother of all topics, Should a women take responsibility for raising kids and a man just go hunting?”. Responses were fun and it was more interactive. You have to explain “If yes, then why yes? If no, then why no?”. On the walls were posted brain storming charts about writing your thought process on paper. The questions were mostly questions to yourself about “Why we are doing this?”, “What are our rights?”, “How should we fight for our rights?”. This was impressive in the sense that we are going away from our old mugging pattern of education than towards more exploratory and engaging pattern of education and asking questions than accepting the laws imposed on us. I think that is what is the meaning of KHOJ is to find a way. I wish such kind of training is promoted in all the education systems across the world”*



## STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPORT

The fact that we are a vibrant organization also brings with itself certain sense of responsibility towards the community and society in which we work. Since our engagement with youths has been widely known, we always come across young students who are studying and need support to sail through these years with little handholding, encouragement and financial support. Standing by them has become an inherent parts of KHOJ's work ever since its inception. Sometimes this support is generated through friends and well wishers while largely this is also raised through contributions from the team.

Similar has been the history of Medical Support. Every year there are emergency cases that need some medical support. While the effort is to mobilize the Government funds, at times due to various criteria and constraints and looking at emergency, KHOJ has supported people needing Medical Aid with whatever it could; be it young or old.

## VEHICLE SUPPORT FOR KHOJ



A new entry into the KHOJ team is a new Bolero vehicle which has been added due to the generous support of **Caring Friends, Mumbai**.

Caring Friends is an informal network of friends and well wishers who support work of development organisations like KHOJ.

We are also thankful to f Mahindra & Mahindra for subsidizing the costs for us and for their efforts to give us a good vehicle.

Our earlier Mahindra Armada vehicle has been us through the toughest times and has seen several hard moments in the field. It has put a run of over 300,000kms behind and is still being of a great use in the tough terrain of Melghat. This was a highly subsidized support of Mahindra &Mahindra back in 2001.

We hope that this new entry will make our life a lot easier and increase the pace of work of empowering people and ensuring Justice.

## Our Institutional Supporters –

- Oxfam (India)
- Bhavishya Alliance
- AID
- Sathi (Cehat)
- CASA
- Caring Friends

And all of you who have contributed not only monetarily but through your trust and faith that keeps us alive and active on the objective of ensuring Justice and empowering masses for a better life.



Report Prepared By –

Purnima Upadhyay for  
KHOJ  
Yashwant Bhavan  
At Po Gaurkheda(Kumbhi)  
Tal Achalpur  
Dist Amaravati 444 806  
Phone 07223-227292  
Email – [khojmelghat@gmail.com](mailto:khojmelghat@gmail.com)

Registered Office –

C/o Vijay Jawlekar  
D/3/20, Chittaranjan Nagar,  
Rajawadi, Vidyavihar(East)  
Mumbai 400 007  
Email – [khojmelghat@gmail.com](mailto:khojmelghat@gmail.com)  
Registration No Mum/Mah/1997/1021