

Facilitating community based approaches to peace building processes in Kandhamal District, Odisha



In response to outbreaks of violence in Kandhamal in 2008, since 2010 Trócaire has supported specific programmes on the protection of human rights through community mobilisation. In 2010, Trócaire partner Jana Vikas started an innovative 5 year community mobilisation programme which included a specific component on engaging with both tribal and dalit¹ communities of Hindus and Christians in 58 villages of 5 Gram Panchayat² of K. Nuagaon Block. This programme focused on a village development approach to peace building, supporting Community Based Organisations (CBOs) to promote and participate in peace building at a local level and to influence local government administration for the inclusion of village development plans into Panchayat, Block and District level plans. Jana Vikas has been working with communities who have been disempowered for decades due to chronic poverty, bad governance and protracted conflict.

A major report on violence in Kandhamal³ in 2010 found that during the two phases of targeted violence in Kandhamal, in 2007 and 2008, more than 600 villages were ransacked, 5,600 houses were plundered and burnt, 38 people were murdered and 54,000 people were made homeless. The attackers destroyed 295 churches and other places of worship, 13



▲ Catherine English medium school campus - a Trócaire funded relief camp

schools and offices of several non-profit Christian organizations were damaged. About 30,000 people were uprooted and lived in relief camps for six months and continue to be displaced. During this period about 2,000 people were forced to renounce their Christian faith. More than 10,000 children had their education severely disrupted due to displacement and fear. Compared to the actual losses incurred, the compensation provided by the Government of

¹ The term used for a section of Indian society traditionally considered 'Untouchable'. The Constitution of India recognises them as 'Scheduled Caste'.

² A village level statutory institution of local self-government in India at below district level and have been given Constitutional statues under 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Indian Constitution.

³ National People's Tribunal on Kandhamal Report. Report available at: http://www.csfhr.com/reports/Kandhamal_violance/Report%20of%20%20National%20People's%20Tribunal%20on%20Kandhamal%20Violence.pdf



▲ Four villages Dadingia Panchayat people going to Raikia Block Relief Camp after 2008 violence

Odisha was extremely low and insufficient to enable those affected to resume normal life. The District Magistrate of Kandhamal stated that the government did not have a policy to compensate for losses like household articles, agricultural equipment, livestock, poultry and other livelihood related losses. As a result, people found themselves in an unfamiliar new reality. Before the riots, the different groups of people in villages (dalits, tribal, Christian minorities and other castes) had co-existed in peace and harmony for decades. They had their own governance systems and although they were deprived of basic rights like food, education and health the different groups worked together to support each other at times of crisis.

Diagram - 1: Structure and Roles of Community Based Organisations (Village, Panchayat and Block Level)

		STRUCTURES	ROLES
BLOCK LEVEL	ANCHALIK VIKAS PARISHAD (AVP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Body: 15 members (5 women and 10 men) 40% women – 60% men approx. 3 selected members from each PVP (see below) nominated to AVP Executive Body Meeting - Once a month with minutes and resolutions recorded Not a registered body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses at Block level the issues coming from village or Panchayat levels. Strengthening the 5 PVPs Advocacy and lobbying around issues vis a vis implementing authorities Communication and exchange of information at Block level
	PANCHAYAT VIKAS PARISHAD (PVP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Body : 15 members (5 women and 10 men) 40% women – 60% men approx. 1 to 2 selected members from each TVC (see below) nominated to PVP Executive Body Meeting - Once a month with minutes and resolutions recorded Not a registered body 5 PVPs are in the project area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and prioritizing common/specific concerns of villages for discussion at gram sabha Deciding courses of action and assigning tasks to various groups of people Networking/Engaging with local government authorities Development of strategies for participation and mobilization of community Developing leadership
VILLAGE LEVEL	TRADITIONAL VILLAGE COMMITTEE (TVC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the adult members of the village are members of the TVC Executive Body - 7 to 11 members approx. (3 women and 4 men) 40% women - 60% men approx. Office Bearers – President, Vice president, Secretary, Treasurer and 3 supporting members Executive Body Meeting - Once a month with minutes and resolutions recorded Not a registered body Executive body members are nominated or elected in the village through a democratic process 58 TVCs are in the project area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to different issues focused on addressing the needs of the community specifically vulnerable subgroups such as minorities, women or children. Engaged in resolving local issues and conflicts Involve different groups together to work towards the development process for sustainable co-existence Monitoring of existing schemes and services Deciding course of action and assigning tasks to various groups of people Developing leadership

Purpose of Community Mobilisation Process

After the riots in 2010, communities experienced a major shock that overturned social and economic systems and people found themselves in an unfamiliar new reality. Against this backdrop the CBOs focused on addressing the needs of the affected communities as a whole, and the needs of specific vulnerable sub – groups such as women, children and minorities. TVC, PVP and AVP engaged in conducting village community level meetings with traditional leaders, village leaders and Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) representatives to build a rapport within the community, to identify and analyse the reasons and nature of conflict and address these from a development perspective. Issues that were identified included lack of drinking water facilities, lack of roads and infrastructure, lack of government social security schemes, ongoing community disputes and inadequate access to emergency relief.

BOX 1:

Traditional Village Committee (TVC) is a village level informal body where all adults are members. In the village the decisions pertaining to social and cultural rituals and minor disputes are taken by the existing traditional leaders. Therefore strategically Jana Vikas promoted the TVCs. Traditional leaders played a vital role in restoring peace in the community as they were neutral to the cause. 40% of the executive bodies of TVCs are women.

Peace building & conflict resolution through Village Development

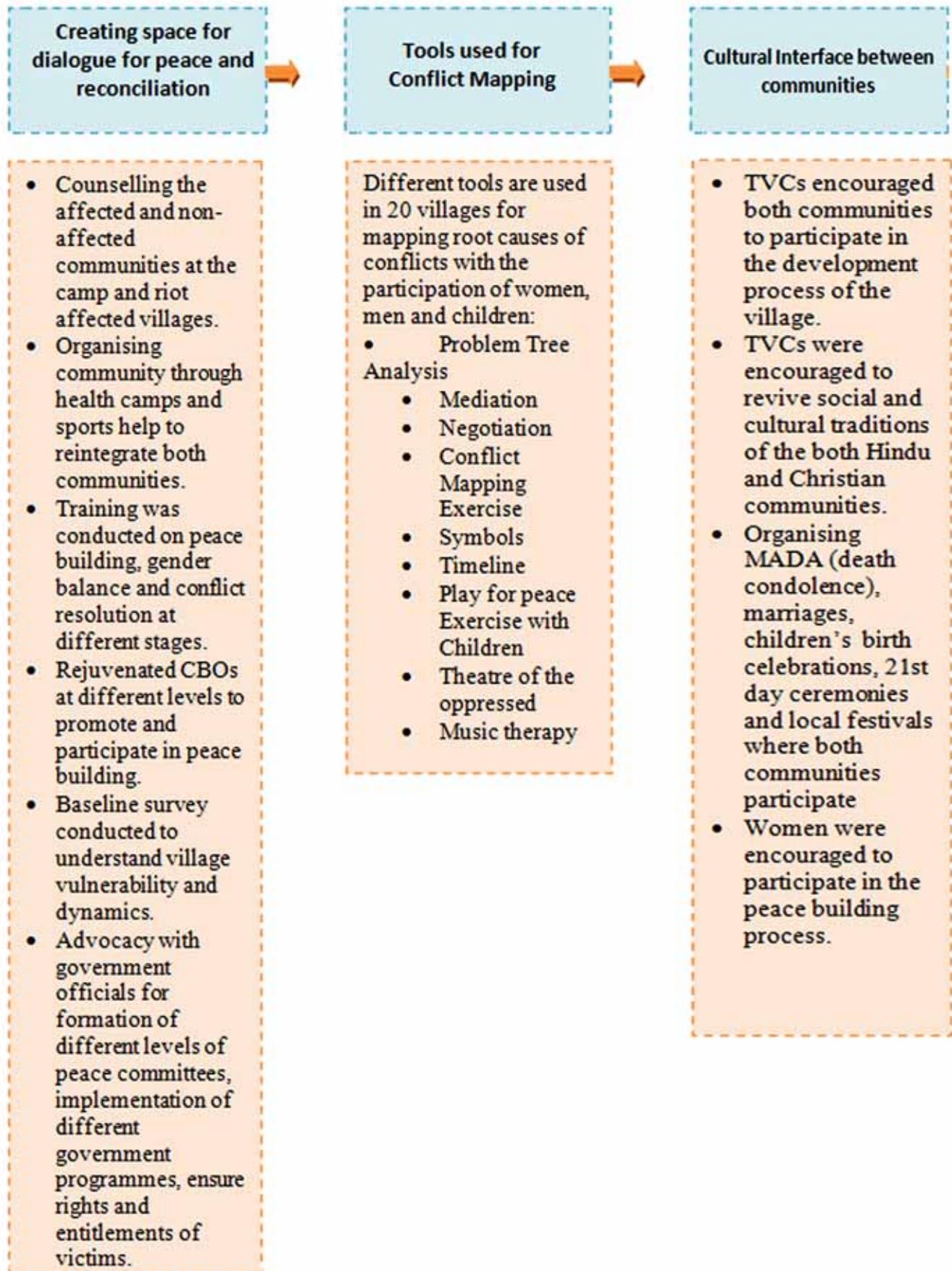
“Be quick to resolve conflicts before they mature to become wars. The energetic crocodile was once a delicate egg!”

Israelmore Ayivor

Gaudipadar is a remote village in the reserve forest in Mahasingh Panchayat. There are 39 families who have lived in the village for 70 years. They have been trying to get land titles for 15 years. There are no basic facilities like roads, health centre and government facilities in the village. Despite these issues, until the outbreaks of violence in 2008 the communities in the village (Christians, Hindus, Adivasi and dalits) had a culture of peace, sharing and unity. The violence disrupted this culture and peace; houses belonging to Christians were destroyed and Christians were prevented from participating in village committees and social customs. Staff of Jana Vikas adopted various strategies to rebuild community relationships by forming traditional village committees (TVCs) and encouraging both communities to come together and discuss the social and economic

issues common to the village. As part of this conflict resolution process communities were supported to apply for their land titles to the Sub Collector’s Office as the lack of land titles was identified as a key issue. The villagers met with the Revenue Inspector to know the status of their land and he committed to submit the map of the village to the relevant department. Once the collector signs, the land title will be issued to the villagers. Following this, Mr. Berkro Mallick, a Hindu leader from the village and member of the TVC, said “the most valued association is the Traditional Village Committee where now everything is discussed and decided. We should not be influenced by outsiders who provoke us to fight among us, rather we should work to develop our village.” Another important success of the post violence peace building process was getting a bridge linking Gaudipadar with a nearby village and electricity facilities in the village. According to Mr. Firoto Digal, secretary of the TVC, “working together irrespective of village, caste, creed and colour is a must for the development of the village”.

Strategies of Community Mobilisation Process:



Impact of Community Mobilisation Process:

Ensure participation of excluded people – especially women, dalit and minorities:

CBOs like TVCs, PVPs and AVPs were encouraged to promote the participation of women and dalit community members and to ensure participatory decision making in village meetings, CBO meetings, pallisabha⁴ and gramsabha⁵. As a consequence, representation of women in the committees has improved. Women have articulated their priorities and brought them to pallisabha and gramsabha for approval. The women have also petitioned the Block Development Officer (BDO) and Collector for the construction of toilets in public



▲ Women discussing their priorities in pallisabha in the Damerikia Village, Kudutuli Panchayat

places and Government offices. As a result, the government constructed separate female and male toilets in the block bus stand. Women have taken the initiative to organise regular meetings and rallies to reduce violence in the villages. Likewise, other excluded groups such as dalit and minorities are participating in decision making processes related to village development and village disputes and are placing their own problems and issues at village level and at pallisabha and gramsabha levels.

Ganduli Digal is a 70 year old widow from Sekaberi village, K, Nuagoan, Kandhamal. She has two daughters and one son. She approached the relevant duty bearers to get her old age pension. Despite her eligibility, she was not given access to her pension. She approached the Traditional Village Committee who took this matter to the office of the collector on her behalf. The collector referred this matter to the relevant duty bearer for immediate action. As a result she got her pension within seven days and she was able to take care of herself. She said “this type of committee should exist in every village to look after the sufferers like us.”

⁴ Village and hamlet level meetings for all villagers to attend as part of India’s system of local governance.

⁵ A body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level.

Creation of more inclusion spaces for dialogue towards peace:



▲ TVC doing conflict mapping with community in the Salpajodi Village, Gunjibadi Panchayat

The process that was initiated in all of the operational villages has ensured sustainable leadership development through empowering local CBOs like TVCs, PVPs, AVPs and SHGs. These bodies have been play a vital role in the planning, monitoring and implementation of government programs and schemes including conflict resolution and social transformation. The TVC is responsible for the holistic development of the village. Likewise the SHGs were involved not only in economic activities but also in village development as a whole. Strong leadership involvement at village level has been visible through their active participation in the PRI process, resource mobilization and peace building initiatives. Regular CBO meetings were held where community leaders, women, youths, children, panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) members and religious leaders participated and a make a meaningful contribution and promotes sustainable capacities and relationships.

Peaceful change:

After the violence the communities had become divided and did not even wish to sit together for discussions. As a result of the development intervention and community mobilisation, communities have started to sit together again in mixed groups, which has improved the sense of belonging and positive behaviour and attitudes among the communities. Communities from different religions respect the collective decisions and actions, children are no longer fearful and people are accessing their rights. They are collectively celebrating ceremonies, festivals and rituals and they are working collectively to achieve the common goals of the village and the community.

Children are no longer fearful

Children were particularly affected by the violence of 2007/2008. Christian minority children were discriminated against



▲ Play for peace exercise using as event with children Salpajodi primary school to relieve from trauma

due to their religion and children became afraid and reluctant to go to school. Children were also isolated by the villagers when they came to play or participate in activities. Staff of Jana Vikas responded by engaging the children in “play for peace” activities which helped children to deal with their fears. These activities included games, dancing and singing.

Luisha Parichha, studying in 10th Class in the Gohingia High school, K. Nuagoan Block shared that she had been afraid of and used to scream when she saw any woman with a red mark (Sindoor⁶) on her forehead after the violence of 2007/2008. During the violence she had seen people with red colour on their foreheads come from outside the village, burn houses, kill people and harass her fellow villagers. However, since participating in activities supported by Jana Vikas, she has now recovered from shock, overcome the fear and has begun to score well in class.



▲ Play for peace exercise in Gunjibadi middle education school

⁶ The mark of a married woman in Hinduism.



▲ Luisha Parichha, Gohingia High school, K. Nuagoan Block

Challenges faced

Prioritising gender in conflict situations:

The Kandhamal conflict has different impacts on men and women. While each individual experience is unique and influenced by many factors, there are strongly gendered trends. While men suffer a greater burden of injury, death and homelessness from the conflict, women face the corresponding burden of loss (of family, husband and children), along with the emotional impacts of trauma, fear, sexual violence and displacement. In addition, women have the burden of responsibility that comes with becoming a head of household for the first time after they have lost their husbands. In this scenario Jana Vikas didn’t incorporate gender mainstreaming in their response, and this is now an ongoing challenge.

Acceptance at Community level:

Jana Vikas, as a Christian faith based organisation was not accepted by the Hindu families in the village. Although Jana Vikas had been working with the communities since 2003, after the violence people lost trust in others and communities did not cooperate or greet the staff of Jana Vikas when they visited the village. To address this issue Jana Vikas organised a Block level health camp in the post conflict period which responded to the needs of more than 5,000 Hindus. This helped to rebuild trust with the Hindu community as it responded to their immediate medical needs, and also opened a way for Jana Vikas to enter the villages.

Government has no contingency plans for man-made disasters:

Post conflict villages are not able to settle back in their villages because government did not have contingency plans to provide for household articles, extra funds to rebuild houses and livelihood related resources. Those who could not manage to repair their houses with the compensation received for house damage did not return to the villages and were forced to stay in the abandoned relief camps or migrate to outside districts.



Lesson Learned

- Post conflict entry point activities should be the development approach for facilitating organisations. Activities like organising health camps, sports events for children and youth, workshops and training on various provisions and schemes of the government can be used as processes to address and resolve issues and contribute towards the peace building process.
- In order to work effectively with diverse communities in a post conflict period, dynamics between communities need to be understood. A major learning during the conflict mapping exercise in 20 villages was that the power dynamics are also influenced from actors outside the communities. Villagers are influenced by external religious fundamentalists who are in political parties. Village level conflict creators can be puppets of these powerful perpetrators and this aggravates communal conflicts and disputes at the community level. During mediation and negotiation it is easier to work with victims but difficult with perpetrators.
- Restoration of peace and harmony in the villages can be possible through cohabitation of the affected tribal and dalit communities. Adopting a development approach that addresses underlying issues that affect all members of the communities is important.
- Partner staff with relevant personal capacities, conflict resolution skills like mediation, negotiation and problem identification and analysis, as well as experience of working in post conflict situations are essential to do this work effectively.



▲ Executive body members of TVC

Burdakia, Patamaha, Dugdum, Jargisuga, Godipadar, Kiramaha, Sakusbali and Dalkipodi villages are comprised of 321 households and have a population of around 1444 people. There is a piece of common land situated at Sakusbali village, which is used for the social functions of these villages including as a playground for children. During the outbreak of conflict, Hindu fundamentalists wanted to occupy that land for the purpose of building a Temple in this place. Young people belonging to the villages opposed this plan but the leaders of the Hindu fundamental groups started the construction work forcefully. The young people approached PVP members to intervene and stop the construction. The PVP members immediately filed the case in the nearest police station. Divisions occurred between the dalits (Hindu), tribal peoples, dalit Christians and other caste communities. PVP members initiated a series of meetings with the different communities to restore peace and build common consensus. Consensus was built among the community members that the land would continue to be used for common social functions and as a playground for children. The local community members came together and reoccupied the land. Currently the ground is still being used for hosting social functions and as a playground.

Bireshwar Digal president of PVP said that “We have seen the riots and have experienced the horrible consequences. We have observed the broken relationships. We will resist the ill vested interest of the people. We will not allow them to sow the seeds of hate”. We will reap the peace and harmony among the community and our children will prosper and live dignified lives.”

Conclusion

Jana Vikas's community mobilisation and human rights programme in Kandhamal applies a range of innovative strategies to engage with both Hindu and Christian communities. The programme is currently only mid-way through a five year programme cycle, but already the results are promising. Crucial to the success of the programme is

engagement with external religious fundamentalists who are in political parties. Jana Vikas promoted the traditional village committee where the leaders are independent of their thoughts and vision. Traditional leaders played a vital role in restoring peace in the community as they were neutral to the cause. They were trained in government functions and provisions. The traditional village committees are now engaged in development processes, and are participating in panchayat and gram sabha and demanding their village needs.

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