

Building Social Capital *for* Promoting Grassroots Democracy

2010

Deepening Grassroots Democracy

DHAN's Way



DHAN believes that social capital that provides basis for grassroots democracy is generated by organising the unorganised poor and marginalised communities into Peoples' Organisations. It creates new social and economic safety nets by enhancing peoples' trust and ability to work together, on the basis of which co-operation for the public good and democratic participation become possible. The Peoples' Organisations play an important role in promoting democratic decision making, empowering poor men and women to govern and manage their institutions, and linking them with mainstream institutions to claim their entitlements.

Over 750,000 poor families, who have been organised into 30,000 self-managed primary groups in 10,000 villages across 12 Indian States, are involved in poverty reduction initiatives in addition to promoting a culture of democracy at the grassroots.



DHAN Foundation

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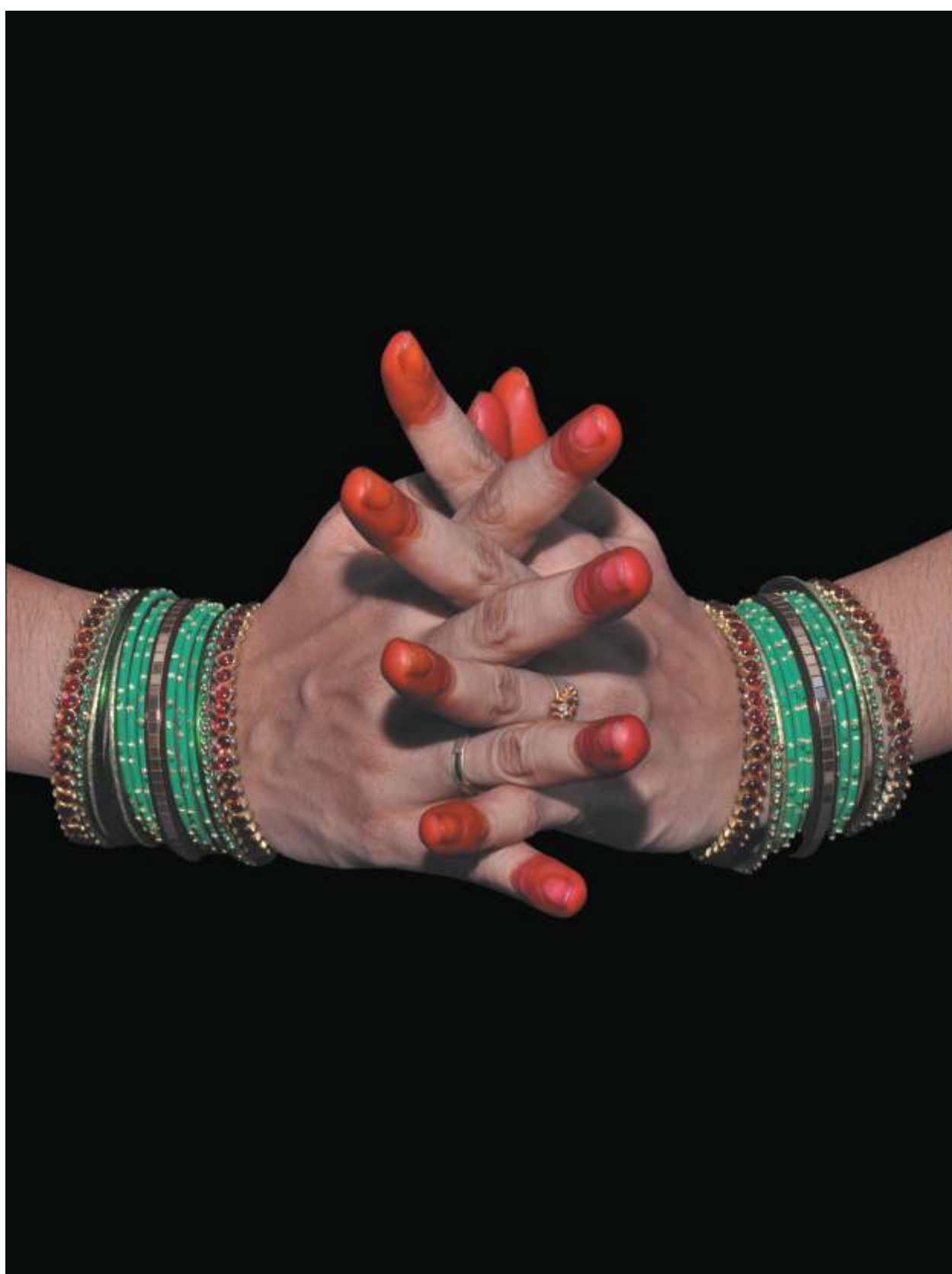
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Promoting Nested Institutions for Preserving Autonomy



DHAN believes that independence with interdependence is a core of grassroots democracy. The Primary Groups of poor families promoted by DHAN are independent and act as ideal platforms for practicing direct democracy. The nested institutions promoted among these primary Peoples' Organisations both vertical and horizontal, enable interdependence, and increase solidarity resulting in stronger and more resourceful organisations. The nested institutions value representation of collective interests and reinforce shared responsibilities of members. These institutions retain their autonomy while working in partnership with mainstream institutions.

All the 30,000 Primary Groups have been networked into 1400 Cluster and Cascade Development Associations, and federated into 164 Federations. All these institutions are working with over 210 branches of 36 nationalised and private banks, 30 District Rural Development Agencies, six insurance companies to implement development programmes.



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Ensuring Self-governance *for* Attaining Self-reliance



DHAN believes that social networks and associated norms facilitate co-operation and co-ordination, which reduces the costs of interventions and increases productivity. DHAN insists sustainability in social, financial, and technological aspects from the very beginning of building Peoples' Organisations. The primary groups start meeting their costs of operation from day-one, which builds their confidence and capacity to manage both financial and human resources on their own. By making decisions, monitoring their own progress, and solving conflicts, people acquire a sense of solidarity, as well as competence to govern their institutions.

Every year the poor families contribute over Rs.50 to 60 million through their Peoples' Organisations to meet the cost of managing their operations in addition to sharing their contribution for taking up development interventions. Depending on the context, each organisation defines its timeline for reaching sustainability.



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Shared Goals & Vision *for* Sustaining Grassroots Democracy



DHAN believes that shared vision stimulates peoples' aspirations and builds resilience to rise to the challenges of poverty and inequality. The primary groups and network institutions share a vision of poverty reduction and self-reliance that places people at the centre. This vision is driven by values of self-help and mutuality that commits everyone to deepening independence and interdependence as means of advancing grassroots democracy and good governance. It develops homogeneity in thinking and opens new vistas to the members to identify, generate and act on their development goals. Also it reinforces their personal responsibility to generate, manage and conserve resources for collective wellbeing.

Through future-search mechanisms, goal setting and benefit realisation exercises, the Peoples' Organisations enable members' families to set milestones for their development. Reviews and celebrations reinforce the goals and vision that they have set for themselves.



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Ensuring Entitlements & Setting Agenda for Mainstream Institutions



Participation denotes individual as well as collective efforts to increase and exercise control over resources and institutions. DHAN strongly believes that stake for the poor families in development efforts elevates their self-esteem, which brings ownership and legitimizes them to voice for their access and equity within and outside their institutions. Participation and ownership ensures quality of outcomes and gives continuity for the institutions. Having access to decision-making space in an area directly relevant to their lives motivates them toward 'higher' forms of participation and democratic practices.

Every year, the poor families contribute over Rs. 200 million towards their development programmes. Their contributions are in the form of savings; share for renovating common property and natural resources by cash, kind and labour; sharing expertise towards building competency of their fellow members and so on.



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Transparency & Accountability for Ensuring Equity

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DHAN believes that transparency and accountability in administration are the indispensable constituents of participatory democracy. Right to information, with practical provisions to give effect to this right facilitates participation in decision making. The Peoples' Organisations promoted by DHAN facilitate auditing and disclosure of financial progress to all the members, and monitoring development and equitable distribution of benefits to everyone. All the meetings held in primary groups and networks are open and decision making is carried out by the consensus of everyone. Norms, rules and decisions are open to discussion and there is no opportunity for outsiders to abuse the system in their own interest.

General body and Mahasabha meetings in the Peoples' Organisations enhance trust and affinity among the members, and provide space for them to articulate their views and interests, and influence policies and decisions in their favour. Computerisation of all transactions followed by annual audit by qualified chartered accountants at all levels is rigorously practiced by the Peoples' Organisations.



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Shared Responsibility *for* Facilitating Self-governance



The Peoples' Organisations promoted by DHAN create a platform for members to come together to exchange information, share ideas, and demonstrate their care and concern in a framework that promotes shared responsibility. These organisations from a self-regulation perspective enable their members to evolve norms, bye-laws, and policies to reinforce personal and collective responsibilities. Being a part of larger Movements of Kalanjiam and Vayalagam, the Peoples' Organisations propagate the culture of "Sharing" in every possible action and nurture the value of mutuality, amplify their voice against exploitation and issues affecting

Both Kalanjiam and Vayalagam Movements promote a sharing culture among its member families through Jyothi programme, where the contribution from members is used to reach out to more poor families. Members save handful of rice everyday and share with the needy as an expression of their concern towards orphans and aged women and men.



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Building Alliances *for* Fostering Grassroots Democracy



DHAN believes that partnerships that encourage community ownership and self management can promote self-awareness and facilitate the Peoples' Organisations to bargain for collective wellbeing. This can increase people's sense of control over issues affecting their lives and build sound and responsible demand system to claim their entitlements. Only through open and flexible alliances with mainstream institutions, poor communities can articulate their development priorities and influence policies and practices that can affect their lives. Institutionalising these collaborative mechanisms will provide a greater chance of continuity, consistency and sustainability for development.

The Peoples' Organisations are working with over 210 branches of 36 nationalised and private banks, 30 District Rural Development Agencies and six insurance companies. Last year they have mobilised around Rs.850 million from these institutions for various development interventions related to microfinance, water and rainfed farming development.



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Unleashing Local Leadership *for* Sustaining Grassroots Democracy



DHAN recognises that community leadership is a precious resource for grassroots democracy and it believes that poor has native wisdom, rich life experience and leadership qualities. Opportunity exists for everyone to take-up leadership responsibilities and enabling environment provided by the organisation helps them unleash their leadership potentials. Leadership rotation and graduation mechanisms expand leadership opportunities. The leaders emerge from the Peoples' Organisations are valued for their long-term commitment and consistency in their collective interests. Role modeling to demonstrate ideals of leadership earn them goodwill and trust among fellow members.

The Peoples' Organisations have created leadership space for over 160,000 poor women and men starting from the primary groups at village level to the Movement at the national level. An equal number of leaders had occupied the leadership positions already in these organisations, and they continued to guide the present leaders.



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Mentoring Leaders *for* Facilitating Grassroots Democracy



DHAN believes that mentoring for purpose-centric leadership is the key for evolving good governance at the grassroots. The leaders in the Peoples' Organisations are grounded in basic respect for fellow members and their ability to do what is right, to learn, and arrive at intelligent decisions. While arguing for their opinion, these leaders work for building consensus. The Peoples' Organisations provide opportunities for getting trained and training others to enhance their leadership capabilities. Interaction and exposure within and outside the institution build alternate perspectives and appreciation for other's perspectives.

The leaders undergo a variety of capacity building programmes such as induction and orientation programmes to impart the leadership concepts, values and qualities; exposure visits to encourage cross-learning of best practices and new initiatives across Federations; workshops, seminars and conferences to provide a platform for sharing experiences and learn different perspectives; and as a part of steering committees with collaborating agencies.



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Executive & Judiciary Systems Synergizing Good Governance

for

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DHAN believes that good governance, fair judiciary, competent and sensitive executive systems are critical to ensure quality of development outcomes. Good governance, to be effective and sustainable, must be anchored in a rigorous working democracy that respects the norms, rules and procedures set out by the members in the primary groups and their networks. A professionally competent, capable and credible executive system that operates within an accountable and ethical framework is paramount for ensuring good governance. Proper checks and balances, consistent and contextualized rules for transactions and conflict resolution, ensure just distribution of benefits.

Over 700 professionals drawn from diverse disciplines and reputed academic institutions across India are working at the grassroots in tribal, rural, urban and coastal contexts. Together with 2,000 local field functionaries, they work closely with over 160,000 People Leaders to manage the Peoples' Organisations at different levels.



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Grassroots Democracy *for* Building a New Social Order

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DHAN is committed to building Peoples' Organisations that can achieve the highest democratic ideals. These organisations earn goodwill and identity to provide a strong and credible voice in advancing progressive solutions to critical social, economic and cultural issues. With greater emphasis on the values of self-help, mutuality, and self-regulation, these Peoples' Organisations are working towards building a new social order in which the poor and marginalised families can identify, generate and act on their choices, determine the meaning of their lives and their identities, negotiate and ascertain equity and equality within their societies.

After a decade in incubation, both Kalanjiam Community Banking Programme and Vayalagam Tankfed Agriculture Development programmes grew into Peoples' Movements spearheaded by the Peoples' Organisations at the grassroots level. These Movements are nurtured and supported by DHAN to address the larger development issues related to women and water.



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