

supporting NGO partner, they provided technical trade training support, and enabled a few young men to increase their “marketable skills” so that they could earn more in the places where they go. Training was imparted for works in: light fitting, plumbing, welding, driving, and skills for cooks, waiters and room-boys in the hotel industry. Eleven young men attended the trade training and now they are working in the different places in the country, and earning more money than they would have as an unskilled labourer.

#### **Forest Land Issues --**

In this area, 891 families are residing on forest land, and have had their homesteads there for the last five decades. This Society is working with these tribal farm families on forest land rights issues, and are trying to get their land rights recognized by the government. The Jarga Development Society worked with the national level campaign trying to get the central government to pass the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill.

#### **Women’s Self Help Groups --**

The Jarga Society is running 26 women’s self-help groups. Four SHGs got themselves linked to the bank, and took a bank loan from the bank and started working on various micro-enterprise income generating activities.

#### **Right to Information Act --**

The Jarga Society members have been spreading awareness about the Right to Information Act recently passed by the government. On October the 13<sup>th</sup>, the Society started a “walking tour” or Padyatra of several days through the villages of Kumbalgarh Block, Rajsamand District. The Padyatra spread awareness of the RTI Act in 21 villages of the Block.

#### **The Debt Issue –**

The Jarga Society also decided to work on Debt issues, problems related to the debts of both money-lenders and banks, because this issue came up in the Block area, and Core Committee (Sanchalk Mandal) meetings.

### **VAGAD LABOURERS AND FARMERS ASSOCIATION (VAGAD MAZDOOR KISAN SANGATHAN)**

This Organization of the labourers and farmers in the Vagad region was formed in 1998 in order to take up the forestland rights issue and also to work on the implementation of the legislative provisions with regard to Tribal Self Rule in Dungarpur District. The Organization's efforts also aim to check displacement and solve the problems of the small marginal farm families.

In 1995 the forestland issue was emerging in and around Udaipur District as an urgent and upcoming issue. People from Dungarpur approached Astha with the request that they too should be associated with this work – “Please help us to get organized too.”

With Astha's experience in Kotra, Astha had seen the need to develop an organizing strategy of leadership development of the local people with Astha taking a low profile with few workers in the area. (In Kotra, where Astha had started its field work, with many workers, everyone knew "Astha". When Astha formed the "Tribal Development Forum", it was very difficult for the Forum adivasi leaders to establish their identity. Astha learned from this experience – the People's Organization's identity should be out front!) In 1995, Astha appointed 1 worker to Dungarpur, and he formed the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization (Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan) which now works in the 5 Blocks of the District. Initially, the Sangathan members took up the issue of displacement from forestland homesteads, and were part of the "Jungle Jameen Jan Andolan". The registered support Society is "Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sansthan". The work has also expanded to Banswara District and the Organization works in 2 Blocks there, and has an office in Kushalgarh Block.

#### **Major Objectives --**

- To make the adivasi people aware of the benefits of the Tribal Self Rule legislation, and to help them to become Village Republics with greater control over the resources of their villages, and what goes on there
- To bring into being strong Gram Sabhas of Village Republics so that they can govern their villages in the interests of the tribal citizens living there.
- To prevent displacement of the people of the area
- To stop corruption and exploitation of the poor people
- To make the government programmes and laws known to the people so that they can take advantage of the benefits of these programmes and laws
- To develop strong and aware leadership for the Organization, and to help that leadership to organize and maintain a strong structure of Block Level and District Level Committees to work with and for the poor people of the area

#### **-- Major Highlights of the Year --**

Astha has helped the Organization to organize regular meetings at various levels – monthly meetings of Block Committee members, monthly Core Committee meetings of representatives from all 7 Block areas of operation. These meetings provide a platform to bring people together where they can raise their problems and plan collective efforts to solve the problems. Some of the problems the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization has worked on in the last year were:

#### **Tribal Self Rule --**

The organization is working in 2 Districts, namely, Dungarpur and Banswara. The Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization is working on Tribal Self Rule and as per the PESA Act, works with the committee and the Village Assembly (Gram Sabha) of the Village Republics of 105 villages of the Dungarpur and Banswara districts. These villages are helped to manage their villages, according to the provisions of the the PESA Act.

The committees of the Gram Sabhas of these 105 villages have been working with Astha to try to get the Government of Rajasthan to pass Rules which will

enable the provisions of the Rajasthan PESA Act to be implemented. Without Rajasthan Rules for the Rajasthan legislation, the tribal Village Republics have been relying on the central government legislation provisions. But there are contradictions at the state level – e.g. in rules and procedures in the Forest Department which auctions forest produce, in the Irrigation Department which does not yet recognize the tribal village's control over minor water bodies, etc.

Astha has also been working with the Tribal Self Rule Villages in Dungarpur, to work out the working interface between the Gram Panchayats of the PRI local self government system, and the Tribal Self Rule Villages which find themselves geographically included in the Gram Panchayat areas.

### **Forest Land Issue --**

The tribal farmers associated with the Vagad Organization have worked on the forest land issues with the national campaign for the passage by the central government of the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill 2005. The Organization is mobilizing people to join District, South Rajasthan region, State and National level demonstrations in favour of the Bill, to meet their M.P.s, to put pressure on the Government to pass this Bill.

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act --**

The Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization celebrated the launching of the NREGA on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2006. The Organization celebrated with MKSS and a big convention was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February in which 600 people participated. In that convention, a decision was made to plan for a mass level social audit in Dungarpur District in the month of April 2006. It was planned that a national "walking tour" or Padayatra through the area, visiting work sites of the NREGA would be arranged. Astha's position in relation to NREGA is that we should try very hard to make it a success – it is an important "safety net" for the poor in the country in these times of crisis for survival with dignity. If the initial 200 Districts in the country are not successful in implementing this important employment guarantee scheme, the government will not expand it. Therefore, Astha, and the People's Organizations associated with Astha, are trying hard that the local rural people are aware of the formalities, procedures, and terms and conditions of the work.

### **Right to Information Act --**

In trying to get justice in labour wage payment struggles, in trying to make sure that truly poor families have been selected on the Below Poverty Line lists, in all kinds of situations, the new Right to Information Act provisions are helpful. Now, people have the right to get the information they need in order to make sure that the laws and policies are implemented as they should be. India's development problems have always centred around "implementation". Now that the People's Organization members are aware of programmes, plans, policies, laws, they are coming forward to make sure these are actually implemented! Awareness about the Act, and support to communities that tried to get information out of the government records, is a role of the P.O. In the past year, with the help of the

leaders of the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization, information was obtained from the Gram Panchayat office records.

#### **Debt issue --**

The Vagad Organization decided to work on the Debt issue because this issue came from the village and regional meetings. It seems that the banks are “over-recovering” loans from the poor tribal farmers of Dungarpur, and are doing it knowingly. With the help of the Right to Information Act, bank records of nationalized banks and registered Cooperative Banks have to be made available. The Organization is helping members affected by this problem to save themselves from this corruption and exploitation. This problem is widespread.

#### **GORWARD TRIBAL ASSOCIATION (GORWARD ADIVASI SANGATHAN (GAS) )**

The Garasia tribals of Bali and Desuri Blocks of Pali District had been associated since 1998 with the “Jungle Jameen Jan Andolan” or the people’s campaign to fight displacement from tribal homesteads by the forest department. The people of these Blocks actively participated in the regional level meetings held on the forest land issue, and in 1999, formed their own area organization. It is primarily an adivasi organization, formed in an area where adivasis are in the minority, and the dominant feudal and upper caste attitudes create many problems for the tribal men and women. The Association is a support to its members when atrocities and hardships arise. Through the collective actions of the Association, the adivasis are trying to increase their self-confidence and strength, to take their place as citizens with full rights and duties. The support Society to GAS is “Mahidhar”.

#### **Major Objectives –**

- To fight oppression and exploitation inflicted on the members of the Association
- To improve the economic condition of the poor adivasi families of these 2 Blocks
- To build a strong Organization which can bring knowledge and analysis of socio-economic conditions to the members, and help them to plan and work together to solve problems faced.
- To develop leadership from amongst the members of the Association, both men and women leaders
- To fight attempts to displace the adivasi families from their forest land homesteads, and to try to get legal land ownership papers for their land
- To work for peace and communal harmony in the area
- To organize and empower the tribal women of the area