



Lothar Binding
Member of the German Parliament
Chairman,
Social Democratic Party, Heidelberg

Overcoming Poverty

Indo-German Watershed Development Program

Exposure and Dialog in Vaiju Babhulgaon, India
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Translated by Mike Browne, Heidelberg



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**Name of Watershed and Exposure Village:
Vaiju Babhulgaon, Ahmednagar District**

Lothar Binding
Platz der Republik 1
11011 Berlin
Tel: +49 30 227 -73144
Fax: +49 30 227 -76435
Email: lothar.binding@bundestag.de

Office
Bergheimer Str. 88
69115 Heidelberg
Tel: +49 6221 18 29 28
Fax: +49 6221 61 60 40
Email: lothar.binding@wk.bundestag.de

Table of Contents

INDO-GERMAN WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM	1
ADVENTURES, EXPERIENCES, POLITICAL DECISIONS	3
EXPOSURE AND DIALOG IN VAIJU BABHULGAON, INDIA.....	4
RESULTS AND EXPERIENCES REPORT	5
<i>Arrival in the Village.....</i>	5
<i>The Gunjal Family – our Guest Family</i>	7
LIFE STORIES	9
<i>The Karale Family– The Rural Life</i>	9
<i>Conversations with the Karale Family.....</i>	10
<i>Marriage</i>	11
<i>Women’s Roles, Men’s Roles</i>	11
<i>Home and Farm</i>	12
<i>Field Work</i>	12
<i>Dreams, Visions, the Future.....</i>	15
<i>The Economic Situation – Improved by WOTR.....</i>	15
CONVERSATIONS, ENCOUNTERS.....	17
<i>A Conversation with the "grampan chayat" or "Panchayat"</i>	17
<i>A Visit to the Junior High School.....</i>	17
<i>Medical Care</i>	18
THE WATERSHED PROJECT IS THE FUTURE.....	19
<i>Ecological and social sustainability</i>	19
THE WATERSHED COMMITTEE AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION	20
FOREST PROTECTION COMMITTEE.....	21
FINANCING AND LOANS.....	22
<i>Micro-financing</i>	22
<i>WOTR.....</i>	22
<i>Village Corporate Society.....</i>	22
<i>Banks.....</i>	23
SUMMARY	23
IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES ATTAINED	23
PLACING POVERTY ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S AGENDA FOR THE FIRST TIME	24
REFLECTIONS AND THANKS.....	24
APPENDIX	26
DIGRESSION: THE WORLD AND WE.....	26
GLOSSARY /ABBREVIATIONS.....	27

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Adventures, Experiences, Political Decisions

Diplomats, representatives of government and parliamentarians, representatives from the business world, creators of culture and tourists: there is continual contact with India. Many have read about India, have traveled thousands of kilometers, are acquainted with hundreds of various hotel rooms, meeting rooms and assembly halls, are familiar with the smells on the streets and the dynamic forces in the city as well as the peaceful pace in the countryside, and have even once broken out in a sweat during a "real Indian car drive". And I know of no one who does not speak about the poverty in India and the international division of labor, and who does not ponder developmental policies. And yet in many cases our intellect reaches only to the outer edge of reality; we are caught up in abstracts and make use of fine sounding clichés.

With this "exposure", which "exposes real poverty" the experience should be immediately made of how those who belong to the poorest human beings live: living in a mud hut for a few days, eating what has been cooked on a small open fire for a few days, going off to the fields for a few days.

To later think about life and experience in this way and thus to have that which was lived become experience, forms a new backdrop on how to make decisions concerning poverty¹ and projects for overcoming poverty within the framework of developmental policy.

Along with this, I am aware of the impossibility of experiencing daily routine because the presence of a foreign guest is a disturbance in the otherwise normal way of life. In addition, it is a great difference knowing that my life situation will again change in a few days and that that life situation was not the timeless condition of my life.

A group of ten Germans participated in this exposure program in India. In India, or more exactly in Maharashtra, we divided into two groups and visited different villages, which participate in the Watershed Project.

Dr. Gisela Hayfa and I visited Vaiju Babhulgaon, a village of 1,272 inhabitants, southeasterly of Ahmednagar. All 247 households participate in the Watershed Project. We stayed with the Gunjal family. We undertook excursions along with official committees to the construction technology facilities of the Watershed Projects, and engaged in conversations. With regard to the family visits and many single conversations, we went after various objectives. This is why Ms. Hayfa visited many different families in villages; during the day, I always stayed with the same family.



Dr. Hayfa, Father Bachert

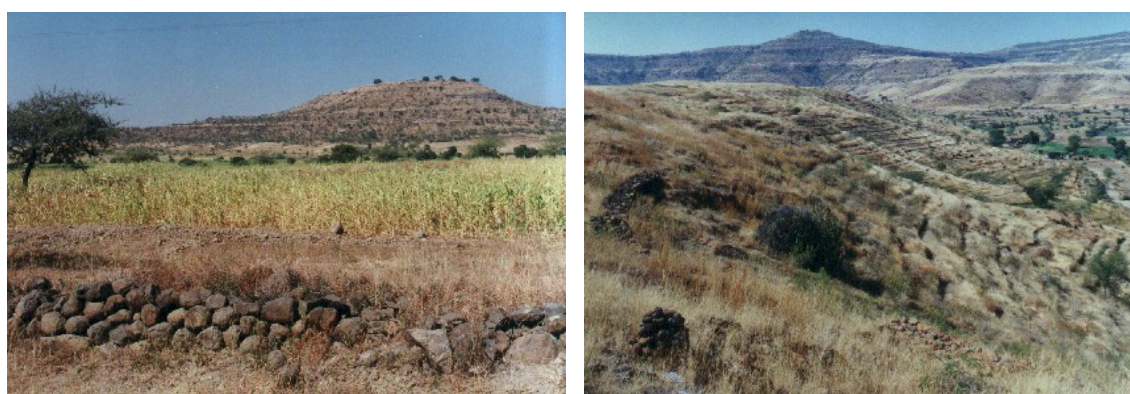
¹Extremely poor means calculated at living on less than one US dollar a day. Presently, there are still around 1.2 billion people sharing this fate. Approximately 800 million people are going hungry or suffer from malnutrition.

The following report is the subjective presentation of my personal impressions. This report is a small part of a comprehensive delegation report that portrays in detail the entire Watershed Project.

Exposure and Dialog in Vaiju Babhulgaon, India

The Society for the Promotion of North-South Dialog has formulated, within the framework of its Exposure and Dialog Program, a project description for members of the Lower House of the German Parliament by the WOTR (Watershed Organization Trust, India), which is quoted below:

The Indo-German Watershed Development Program (IGWSDP) was created in 1989 within the bilateral agreement between the Indian and German governments. Since 1991, the federal government has supported the Watershed Program; since 1992 technical cooperation has been included. The concept of this resource protection project was developed and advanced by Father Herrmann Bacher, SJ, who also founded the Social Center non-governmental organization (NGO). In March 1999 the project was carried out in more than 150 villages, in a total area of over 110,000 hectares. More than 150,00 people inside this area actively participate with the involvement of, at present, 58 NGOs.



Green? - Before, water supply tankers were necessary for irrigation.

The object of the Watershed Program is the regeneration and securing of natural and human resources within a watershed area in order to reduce poverty and to improve the living conditions of the people living there. The term watershed means the catchment area of a river. Within this catchment area, all natural water resources (precipitation, springs, tributaries) flow into the respective river.

The program is based upon the active participation of all participants. A comprehensive set of regulations has an impact to a great extent on: ground and water use, development of economic, social and human resources (especially women and those belonging to lower castes and the landless) as well as an institutional and legal set of regulations that legitimizes self-administration.

*The main participants are:
local self-help groups (Village Self-Help Groups (VSHG)),*

committees for the regeneration of the watershed (Village Watershed Committees (VWC)), committees the protection and care of forests (Forest Protection Committees (FPC)), local non-governmental organizations, WOTR, National Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) and governmental ministries.

The Watershed Program is divided into a capacity building phase and a full implementation phase in the respective project region; it terminates after 4 years.

The WOTR itself is a coordinating and supportive organization within the Watershed Program. WOTR is the official partner of Indian and German governmental authorities and is responsible for the fostering of measures in the capacity building phase. In addition, WOTR is the intermediary between the governmental authorities and the NGOs, as well as to the local self-help groups.

Results and Experiences Report



On the way from Puna to Vaiju
Babhulgaon



Arrival in the Village

After an hours-long drive in a Jeep from Puna to Vaiju Babhulgaon, in which over time, the roads became ever more narrow and the paved sections had long given up the fight with the hard shoulder of the road, we arrived. In a film I had already seen how guests from the rich world are received in African or Asian villages. It is like in a film. We hardly turn onto the last two kilometer-long section of road, which comes to an end in Vaiju Babhulgaon, when several hundred children, women and men come running up to us. The Jeep has to stop quite a ways from the village. We receive coconuts from many women, to show solidarity and as a gift. Each woman dabs, with thick paint, a red dot on our foreheads, which also contained a few grains of rice. Every one of us was adorned with a large necklace of flowers. Flags and background noises of tin drums, rattles, calls of joy and singing accompanies us along the last three to five hundred

meters to the market square. The market square is full – this sentence means in this case, mind you, something different than what we in Germany would assume – that the market square is *really* full.



Just imagine if you could also hear this welcoming music...

We are asked, directly in front of a small temple, to take a seat on chairs. The temple consists of three rooms lying next to each other, before which an approximately five-meter long roof, held up by fat stone columns, gives shade to the area that is completely laid out with cloths. In a second, there are rings around us and no longer one place to sit down. Women sit grouped together, men sit grouped together. There are various speeches of greetings – great joy and one is proud of his guests. More flower necklaces and coconuts. We hardly find the right words to appropriately pay tribute to such an impressive reception.

Symbolic stone figures, with intensely red colored heads, inside the three temple rooms, are pointed out to us -- symbols of the fertility of Shiva. Shiva is next to Vishnu, the second greatest divinity of classical Hinduism. Nils Gutschow writes in his book, "India": "The fertility powers of the god, however, come above all from his obvious symbol, the "linga" (phallus). And in each upright stone the pious eye can recognize this symbol – the more meaningful because where it occurs in nature, created without human assistance: thus the divinity directly reveals itself."

Afterwards, we slowly drive in the Jeep -- without rolling over -- to our guest family. Some men from the district council, who had just taken part in the greetings at the market square, are already waiting there for us: take down the suitcases, introductions to the family, a greetings photograph, and a plate of anis seeds is offered.

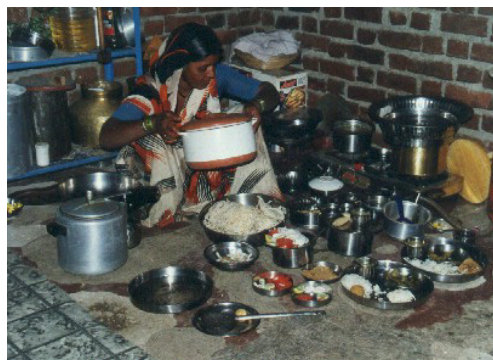
After this, the approaching dusk councils haste and we drive a short way from the village in order to reach, on foot, a few facilities that have been created as part of the Watershed Project: stone walls for slowing down the flow speed of the streams,

horizontal ditches, each with different small water build-up zones to slow the water running down the slopes, trees and grassy areas and forest.

On the way back – we are going through farmed fields that produced nothing before the Watershed Project because of the earlier very dry slopes – the only above ground power supply was pointed out to us² and we visit a small -- we would perhaps say hamlet -- consisting of two outlying farms. An electric light bulb, attached to a stick of wood, apparently taking up about 10-watts, lit up the farm. It is becoming dark quickly and I am aware that we are to the south of a latitude which more or less runs through the Arabian Desert or the Sahara in Central Mauritania. It would have been inconceivable to come here in high summer. The neighbors are sad because we do not drink tea with them. With the help of a flashlight, we find the way back to the Jeep. The village lies in complete darkness.



Indian cuisine



In the evening we are fed magnificently. My assumption, that the "boss of the kitchen" was our hostess, was wrong. Ms. Mangala, social worker, had only been the representative for the Watershed Project for Vaiju Babhulgaon for one year and had, it became apparent during the course of our visit, a relationship of complete trust with all of the families. She knows every house, she cooks in every kitchen, she advises the families, calls together the women's assembly and the Watershed Committee.

I believe that the acceptance and quality of the Watershed Projects depends a great deal on such individuals.

The Gunjal Family – our Guest Family

Mr. Baban Jagannath Gunjal, with his three brothers and their wives with a total of five children, make up a 13-head extended family. This is our guest family. The house consists of three rooms and a kitchen. One room, separated by a divider consisting of shelves, with curtains and two beds, had been set up for us.

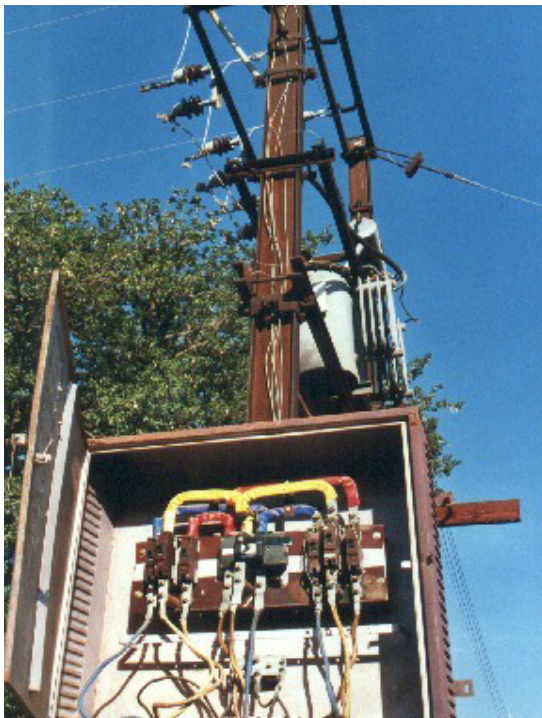
² This means that the entire village is supplied by only a relatively weak aboveground line; thus, not available via a redundant supply. When this one line is cut off, no replacement line can be switched on. Emergency equipment is unavailable on-site.



The Gunjal Family

Baban Jagannath Gunjal is among one of the richest men in the village. Someone mentioned that he was the "second richest man in the village". His house, a very beautiful stone house, built diagonally across with pieces of wrought iron on the doors, had been constructed around 18 years ago. The actual farm lay a few hundred meters distance in the fields and is only occasionally lived in.

Behind the house lies a pomegranate plantation of about 250 trees. With a price of up to 7 Rs for one A-1 pomegranate, around 25,000 Rs per year are made. The plantation is watered by two wells with an electric motor.



For 15 years the village has had this previously mentioned power supply at its disposal – without redundancy or a backup system – which does not always secure the necessary efficient consumption for the entire needs of the village, and occasionally goes out.

After rising, a short way to the little stone house with a French toilet, built just for us. Quick wash. Hot water from the kitchen.

Breakfast in the courtyard: hot pea soup, rice, papadams, raw vegetables, with pomegranates as dessert, tea; everything very delicious. For us there is an extra table, two chairs and a lot of on-lookers.

Life Stories

The Karale Family– The Rural Life

Afterwards we go – this means the facilitator Mr. Tribhuvan and I – through the village in the direction of the guest family. All paths are not reinforced, crooked, dusty but apart from the fresh animal business, quit clean. There was no house which we were not invited into. Tea? Be our guest! The men invite us and carry on a short conversation with us. The women stay in the background, smiling friendly, very interested. Mr. Tribhuvan politely but with clear determination fends off all invitations. We – although he certainly does not say so – yet I felt the answer, “have an appointment”.

Except for a school, a village community building and very few homes, almost all of the buildings are made of mud and brushwood with roof supports. The mud walls are breast high and have a continual brushwood weave in order to gain more height, before this construction transforms into the roof construction. As a rule, the houses consist of one (!) room and an open three-wall extension or a separate building across from the house entrance for the animals.



A Barn.

In the meantime, I have learned that it is not normal to greet women with a handshake. I throw my hostess a glance and greet the three men -- the head of the household and the two sons - with a handshake:

Ramdas Vithoba Karale (Mother)
Kusum Ramdas Karale (Father)



Ashok Ramdas Karale (Son)
Bandu Ramdas Karale (Son)
Savita Ramdas Karale (Daughter)

Friendliness and open friendly eyes are ubiquitous. Hardly have I sat down cross-legged in front of the oven, on the opposite side of the small house, when the rooms fill with more guests and relatives. It is barely possible to believe how many people find space in such a small area. Not many want to miss out on meeting the foreign guest. Behind me stand shelves – wooden boards integrated into the mud walls – seven or eight round and angular metal tins, 20 to 30 cm high, 15 to 20 cm in diameter or edgewise: spices, grains, family treasures. On the wall ledge, this means under the brushwood roof construction, stand -- some even unfit for a flea market – picture frames with old or new family photographs.

Outside, two cows. Yet two years ago, Ramdas and Kusum were "landless people". Only by the WOTR Project was it possible for them to acquire their own land: firstly, because their financial status improved via paid work in the WOTR Project, secondly because now more land in the valley could be productively farmed than earlier.

Conversations with the Karale Family.

My facilitator, Mr. Tribhuvan, told me that he although he lives in the city today, he comes from a small village comparable to Vaiju Babhulgaon. The Ramdas family's living conditions were therefore familiar to him and his support in the way of sensitive translating and in terms of behavior were quite helpful.

As opposed to the usual, the work in the field was dropped for this day. For the whole morning we sat at home and after talking with the district council, for the afternoon as well, and – perhaps I should say – chatted. And once again: start a fire, pour the tea. Everything is very clean and yet the dishwasher at home with environmentally damaging, boiling hot, mixed with aggressive detergents high pressure jetting water comes to mind. The facilitator can read my thoughts. Rather quietly: "Drink tea, eat peanuts, don't drink the water". A smile of understanding. "I have brought along a bottle of water for you".

We introduce ourselves, look at some pictures, drink tea and get to know one another somewhat better as the morning passes by as if on wings.

Marriage

Ramdas married, or rather, was married to Kusum at the age of five years and at the age of ten set up house. Kusum is 10 years older than Ramdas, and they help each other in the kitchen. Specially mentioned was that as a child Kusum, alone with his mother, lived under very poor conditions and there was often less than two-days food in the house. This is why he had worked on other farms even as a child. In contrast to many other conversations in India, a great wedding celebration was not spoken of.

The eldest son takes care of the two cows and is engaged in the Watershed activities; the younger son still goes to school. I did not meet the daughter.

Women's Roles, Men's Roles

Kusum describes himself as the "boss of everything", and Ramdas adds: "but we plan everything together". Kusum is responsible for on what and for how much is to be spent; Ramdas is responsible for the guests, the children and the cooking. My impression is that Kusum dominates the formal structured intra-family decisions; Ramdas however, the social network, and the ties in the village sociogram. There is a peer-to-peer dialog when reaching decisions. An example: when we all went to the fields later, Ramdas did different work in the "Parallel Program". She got water from a well and carried it back home, she brought back some for a neighbor in the village – and developed communicative resources along the way by remaining there – and by catching up with us and by going ahead of us, accomplished her tasks, integrating once again into our small group. All the others went "in the same old way" from field to home in the same way and without interacting with others.

She is also the one who takes the microphone and starts speaking in order to thank her visitors and -- very important – the ones from distant Germany who had helped in the fields, and to wish them all the best. Her ability to communicate in public but the lack of individual development in the sociogram: an almost unbearable tension.



Chatting with Ramdas and Kusum

Home and Farm

The stove is in one corner. A horseshoe-shaped mud construction about 30 cm high in which logs can be pushed into and whose opening is exactly so big that a pot can be hung into it. The smoke goes up via the open brushwood wall-roof construction. In the corner lying diagonally across from this, I can hardly believe my eyes: a tiny television that, however, was not used during my stay and was always covered by a cloth. Ramdas sits next to the stove and always takes care of the fire. Next to her usual place, stand two wooden chests, stacked one upon the other; before her and to the right hangs a large basket. All ingredients for the meals come from this basket, the two chests and the before-mentioned metal tins. A flat stone serves as the most important work surface upon which batter or paste is created by rolling or grating with a wooden rod. Water for cooking and washing is taken from a big container. The water container near the entry door is a pottery vessel that is installed in front of the outer wall, securely bound to it and covered by a wooden lid. I estimate the water supply to be from 30 to 40 liters.

It is hard to believe with how little water a family can get by on – supported by a clever sequence for cleaning. Next to the water container hangs two to three old tins. In front of the house a – I would almost like to say, the obligatory – bed. As a rule, they sleep outside of the house; only when the weather compels it is the bed set up in the house at night, which, mind you, can be rather crowded. There is no toilet. Immediately after getting up or even a bit before, at any rate still by ample darkness, each one goes with a tin full of water as "toilet paper" into nature.

Normally, they get up at 5:00 o'clock, afterwards they wash. The older ones clean their teeth with their fingers and *pan*, an herb similar to tobacco. The first job is to milk the cows. Breakfast is around 9:00 o'clock. After this, Ramdas and Kusum and perhaps the sons, walk two kilometers to the fields in order to carry out the fieldwork. At around 18:00 o'clock, everyone returns from the fields. Usually they walk barefoot. Only Kusum has a pair of plastic sandals and the a wound on his heel wrapped up in a cloth. Ramdas has several silver rings on her toes.

Field Work

As I went along to work in the fields on the following days, straw and hay – which had already been collected into a large pile – were compressed into small bundles and packed into big sacks. These sacks were supposed to have been brought back home on the following day by a tractor with a trailer – I saw only one tractor in the whole village, when we were invited for lunch by the richest farmer in the village. The straw-hay contents of the sacks serve as feed.



The sacks were filled by Kusum and his son.

When beaten,
the shells crack open
and the kernels are
peeled -- but kernels and
the shells are still mixed
together.





The shells are separated from the kernels by being tossed in the wind.

Because the wind today is weak and one must sometimes wait for quite a while for the wind -- a long, laborious process that, if it is not totally finished off in the fields must be done later by hand at home. A life in which the dimension of time appears to be disregarded. With beginner's amazement and cheerfulness, my helpful work was accompanied with friendliness.

My question about a "leisure activity" or play after work, astonished them. "We are tired after work and we go to sleep after eating".



Returning from work in the fields, we saw a transporter for fertilizer.

Dreams, Visions, the Future

Other themes contain hints, too, how much more understanding would perhaps be necessary in order to really understand the lives of Ramdas and Kusum. Even parameters like wealth and poverty are unsuitable in describing differences between our cultures that stretch back deep into socialization: Always to live in one room with the entire family – life-long – without the possibility of retreating to another space, always organizing a daily ritual virtually at the same time with one's life partner, without the possibility of being alone for a time – this creates a kind of dense net of social control of which I can not imagine. And in contrast to Central Europe, where a higher living standard or a higher income goes along with space and time for individual living possibilities, this is not perceivable for Vaiju Babhulgaon or for me. Even the richest farmer in Vaiju Babhulgaon leads a life from this viewpoint totally comparable to those of Ramdas and Kusum. Perhaps Ramdas or Kusum would grieve in an anonymous hotel room after one week.

One exception perhaps presents itself in a doctor who I accidentally got to know one morning as he was heading along on his way to his clinic in another district. But his occupation is not farmer and is, in addition, mobile.

My question about the possibility of producing many children under such socially dense conditions was answered with smiles. "Opportunities always arise, and after the wedding one has the house for oneself" for two.

Questions and answers in connection with terms such as future, visions, plans, security or dreams remain meaningless not because of linguistic barriers, but because of different philosophical or religious concepts of life. Visions of the future or "dreams or wishes about how our life should look like in 10 or 20 years, we do not have" says Kusum, to my surprise. I insist: "as 'landless people' you now have your land; you wanted children and now you have children; you think about building a well and soon it will be a reality – these were indeed dreams from the past for your future...". "No" Kusum replies, and facilitator Tribhuvan explains that destiny had controlled this -- controls this and will control this.

The Economic Situation – Improved by WOTR

Milk comes first in serving their own needs. That which is left over is sold at 7 Rs per liter. The harvest of the seven-acre³ large fields is brought to Ahmendnagar to market. Because Kusum and Ramdas do not have their own vehicle, a "middleman" is necessary who gets paid from the transport and selling. I cannot find out about the exact profit margin of the middleman.

The 7-acres, acquired in the meantime by the two, cost 80,000. Rs. This price is, in comparison to the earlier prices for land – which are paid among landowners – very low because the land was unusable before the activities of the WOTR for farming, and through these additional agricultural areas, demand was easier to satisfy.

³ 2.5 acres make 1 hectare (ha)

Financing:

9,500. Rs could be obtained via their own farming,

30,000. Rs by working in the WOTR Project,

40,000. Rs were financed by relatives with a interest-free loan.

If only one of these financial components were missing, Ramdas' and Kusum's own land would not have been thinkable.

Earlier, before the time of the WOTR Project, my guest family did not have enough money to even think about their own land. The income from work for other farmers is often hardly enough for the necessities: firewood, clothing, nutrition, fruit and sugar.

Earlier, Kusum worked exclusively, today "as a side job", as a carpenter and construction worker. In the meantime, Kusum and his sons could greatly improve their craftsmen's abilities by trainings at the Watershed Project and by the use of different tools. My question about the "watershed" of his customers quickly indicated their limited mobility: there is no bus in the village, the next bus station is about 3 kilometers away. As a rule, one walks – also to the daily work in the fields lying at a distance of two kilometers – now and then there is the possibility of riding along with somebody in a Jeep. Kusum's specialty is the construction of agricultural machinery out of wood: rakes, sowing machines, ploughs, etc. My question about the amount of hourly wage went beyond reality. As a rule, flat rates were agreed upon; much business is based on barter agreements.

Our conversation about prices, costs and taxes gave me a feeling for the material situation: as a rule, land costs between 200,000. Rs and 400,000. Rs per hectare, which is to say 20 to 40 Rs per square meter; the market price for a cow is around 2,000. Rs, but "we need about 5,000. Rs for family festivals or wedding celebrations" per year, says Kusum. The expression on his face indicates his not uncritical relationship to this convention. Their yearly income is 20,000. Rs. My query about the "tax system" and different types of tax was unrealistic. Once a year a "house tax" in the amount of 150 Rs is paid.

The family pays no income tax⁴, because their income lies within the minimum existence of 50,000. Rs.

In our later conversations with the „grampan cheyed", the district council listed more (communal) taxes over which the grampan cheyed also has to decide,: Water tax, house tax, field tax, "business tax" – described as a cooperation tax. I did not understand the answers to my questions about the rules for determining profit and the mill tax.

⁴ Marginal tax rate in the income tax above the minimum for existence:

Gross income	from 50,000. to 100,000. Rs:	10 percent tax
Gross income	from 100,000. to 150,000. Rs :	15 percent tax

Example: with a gross income of from 150,000. Rs, 12,500. Rs must be paid as income tax: Zero Rs plus 5,000. Rs plus 7,500. Rs makes 12,500. Rs.

Conversations, Encounters

A Conversation with the "grampan chayat" or "Panchayat"

In one of the stone houses located in the village square – we would perhaps say Village Community Building – that simultaneously serves as an office for the Watershed Project, we meet (Dr. Hayfa and I) the district council at midday. In the room stands an iron cabinet, one wooden table and one wooden chair. Because it was apparently noticeable that the long continuous cross-legged sitting influenced our legs' blood flow, there were also another table and two chairs made of red plastic. We were led to an empty room, didn't stand a minute there until the room filled up until the last seat, with a light murmuring. Dense crowd, merely a small half-circle around the plastic table remains open. Everybody sat on the floor. With hesitation, we sat on the plastic chairs.

Afterwards, I was hardly able to take in the many impressions, never mind to reflect; I was quite happy that our offer – to answer questions about Germany – was taken up with such friendliness:

"How many inhabitants does Germany have?" – "What? Have I heard correctly? Really so few? How can it be, then, that these few have such a strong economy, that Germany is such a rich country?"

"Who votes in Germany?" "What is the relationship of the Bundesrat to the Bundestag, which is more powerful?" "Who votes for the federal chancellor?"

The various levels of democratic elections – as far as comparable:

Bundesregierung,	Central Government (federal)
Landesregierung,	State Government (state)
Regierungspräsidium,	Zilla Parishad (district)
Kreistag, Regionalverband,	Panchayat summiti (block)
Gemeinderat,	Grampanchayat (village)

"Is there poverty in Germany?"

A Visit to the Junior High School

We come unannounced. Our stepping onto the school grounds is immediately noticed; all the classroom doors are standing open, no teacher who is not by accident coming to the door in order to quickly see who is coming...very disciplined, all the children are sitting on the floor and stand up as the teacher beckons us into the classroom. We are somewhat embarrassed for disturbing the lesson. After friendly introductions by the teacher, there is a song of greeting. We ask about the children's plans, about their future: shy answers: "policeman", "soldier", "language scientist". Unfortunately, the children, in their reserve, do not ask us any questions.

There are 7 classes and 8 teachers, of which one of them is the school principle. Lessons are in 7 subjects: Hindi, Marati, English, mathematics, physics, history and geography.



Instruction goes from 10:00 am to 17:00 pm, including a one-hour break.

Medical Care

Before my visit to the school, I see in one of the two "temples" in the market square, an open U-shaped flat building with three closed walls and four extremely thin supportive columns in the frontage. I notice a small group of women and children and I hear in the normally very quiet village, the cries of children. Just then the inoculation of children is taking place. A nurse who travels from village to village supplies the mothers, about every two weeks, with the most important medicines, inoculates the children and councils on questions of hygiene and health.



Health care at the market square.

The Watershed Project is the Future

Ecological and social sustainability

The many observances and encounters in Vaiju Babhulgaon sharpened my senses for certain ecological-structural peculiarities. It is almost hard to imagine how it must have looked here just a few years ago.

We could see, mind you, sections of land on the drive to Vaiju Babhulgaon that still presented a totally other impression. Desert-like scenery dominated. The color of the ground: dried out⁵. Little green, grassy vegetation -- starkly full of gaps -- hardly any trees, let alone forest. The few ponds or slowly flowing streams that I see near the street in some villages, serve as rubbish dumps. Many regions get their drinking water from water trucks for a few months in the year.

Vaiju Babhulgaon, too, was supplied with drinking water by water trucks for several months just a few years ago. There was no irrigated farming, and farming watered by rainfall continuously sharply increased the difficult living conditions for most families.

Today, the situation has been clearly improved by the WOTR Project. The facilities on the slopes for slowing down the flow-speed of the water running down the slopes during the rainy season, and the thereby upwardly increasing average rise in the water table, as well as, in the meantime, the laid out well facilities, clearly make thicker vegetation possible: much dense grassy growth, and many trees, planted within the frame work of the Project on the slopes and on the line of the heights, have real chances. While earlier the water on the surface of the slopes quickly drained off, today a large part is held back by built up horizontal ditch wall constructions at a distance of around 10 meters and petering out in the upper ground layers of the slope. The erosion process is slowed down and stopped in the end. This effect is strengthened and improved by planting bushes and trees. The water coming down the slopes -- considerably slowed down -- reminds me of the function of our forest floors as a "sponge", as a reservoir.

With this foundation, areas suitable for farming can, even at high locations, plainly be expanded. Thanks to this development, Ramdas and Kusum had the opportunity to obtain land for the first time in their lives. In addition, through a combination of wells and ditch systems, the area of irrigation has been extended.

Equally, like from the ecological viewpoint, the Project also has had a very positive effect from the social standpoint. Through the Watershed Project, many workable fields have been newly created that were unavailable until now: in the area of craftsmanship, the production of ditches, walls and planting, but also in the administrative sector tasks concerning documentation, representation and management. Through this, it was also possible to alter the until now strongly structured, tradition-based hierarchies. Many inhabitants thus had, for the first time, the opportunity, beyond previous structural components, of acquiring a higher income than earlier. Living standards in total and the

⁵ My wife Angelika asks: "brown, red-brown, gray or yellow?" I answer: "yes".

nutritional situation have been improved. These processes of change presuppose, in my estimation, a high level of identification with the goals of such a project.

I believe that the voluntary work on the basis of which each (!) family in the village engages within the Watershed Project, leads to this strong identification with the community project as a total performance of all village inhabitants. Each one who had introduced us to a part of the Project, was full of pride about what had been achieved. In so far as there were also few problems in connection with the limitations of the earlier uncontrolled possibilities for taking wood or chopping down trees, still today, however, wood is used in many homes for heating and cooking. We also got to know some families that cook with propane gas stoves. The forester reported that in the meantime, there are only extremely few problems with the illegal taking of or of even chopping down wood.

In Vaiju Babhulgaon, I met no one who was not already exactly aware of the Watershed Project. And still more. Everywhere one could feel a great consciousness of responsibility as regards ecological developments going along with the Project. The Watershed Project appears to be a (!) positively used central theme for public communication in Vaiju Babhulgaon. Perhaps this impression is also strengthened by this because we had indeed come to Vaiju Babhulgaon exactly in order to get to know this project even closer. On the other hand, the economic and ecological successes and the social changes penetrate the life of the entire village in a manner that the project is pushed into in the center of the village's development, even without foreign guests.

WOTR is a project built to last, this means a system which goes beyond generations that is intended to form the basis for a future-oriented village and regional development. This is why it seems to me that the interconnected approach to economic, ecological, social and cultural targeting is very important. Lasting⁶ developmental policies are forward-looking.

The Watershed Committee and Active Participation

One of the most important meeting points in the village are two multifunctional rooms that sit next to each other in the market square: the village hall, district council hall, citizens' hall, space for banking business and perhaps the most important: the assembly hall for the various committees. In these two rooms sit, next to the district council, the Village Watershed Committee, the Forest Protection Committee, and the Micro-finance Group of Women. For guests, one of the rooms also serves as a reception hall for official meetings.

Impressive, delicate graphs, pictures and statistics about the Watershed Project are publicly displayed on the walls of the just-mentioned rooms – from the start of the

⁶ I am thinking with "lasting" of the classic term from forestry, on the generational sequences of the forest and that a forester sow what he cannot harvest but harvests that which his predecessor sowed. With that, a responsibility going beyond generations is bound together, which our high-speed society threatens to make alien. This is also why the term "lasting" is often used quite differently today in the meaning of "emphatic" or refers to a several years into the future.

project till today. This work lies within the responsibility of the Watershed Committee. This committee forms, according to my impression, the group in the village which looks after all the central functions of planning and development of the entire Watershed Project. Here it is also worked out which work in the voluntary program is to be taken care of and paid and how the work is to be coordinated. The observations, too, of the construction rules lie in the hands of the Watershed Committee. This committee is thus responsible for the central democratic steering organ with great influence and even greater responsibility because here important peripheral conditions about work and income from many families are decided.

Forest Protection Committee

The Forest Protection Committee is an advisory body for the forester who on his part, is obligated to report to a supervisory body, I believe on the regional level, and to the Minister of Forestry. His position on the local Forest Protection Committee stands out because of this.

Accompanied by some district council members, we undertook a small, not totally carefree inspection of a large "reforested" slope and its watershed. At the watershed a row of trees is planted each time as the highest line in the lower mid-hill region --trees that still haven't reached a height of no more than 50 to 60 centimeters, but have good roots. Rows of trees along the line of the heights duplicate themselves about every 10 meters – many plantings are performed by the village inhabitants, according to the instructions of the forester in agreement with the Forest Protection Committee.

In the meantime, reforestation of spoiled or dead plantings and the protection of areas stays in the forefront. Somewhat differently, as we were informed in a conversation with village inhabitants, the forester estimates that the illegal chopping down of trees is still a problem and speaks about a "continually returning discussion about illegal tree cutting". As on the Watershed Committee, there are also monthly reports here by those members of the Forest Committee responsible for individual areas about the total development of the forest.

In total, the different committees make up a system of positive social control, and long-lasting determination of responsibilities – on a self-determined basis (!).

As it already stands out at other locations, the construction of this social network, in my estimation, cannot be thought about without Mangala, the social worker hired by WOTR. The foundation of her work is the personal contact with all (!) families: as a rule, home visits and conversations, organization and participation in all the important committee meetings with a background going far beyond village experience.

Financing and Loans

Micro-financing

"Micro-financing" is the voluntary private amalgamation of village inhabitants for financial support for certain private business projects in Vaiju Babhulgaon, which would be infeasible without collective assistance. Today, 17 female participants have joined together for "micro-financing". The amount "micro-financed" comes to 50 Rs per month. The group discusses for what a loan should be given and who will receive it. As a rule, loans must be paid back within three months, whereby interest amounts to 3 percent per month.

This organization is exclusively for women. The female co-worker at WOTR, Mangala, reports that at the beginning it was not possible to invite the women of Vaiju Babhulgaon to a meeting. She reports that in large parts of India, public meetings by women are not normal. An exception is washing day at the river. The first invitation by the part of the Watershed Project leadership for a general meeting in Vaiju Babhulgaon was unsuccessful. Great shyness. There were various conjectures about the reasons. Firstly, because already functioning groups from other villages had already been invited to their meetings a few times in Vaiju Babhulgaon, and had held their meetings there; some women from Vaiju Babhulgaon were successfully invited as well, so the refusals or shyness are to be overcome.

The first micro-financed acquisition was a small microphone facility that was also set up in the village square on the days of our welcome and farewell.

WOTR

At WOTR there are loans at a interest rate of 15 percent a year, but mind you, by delays in return payments, an interest rate of 8 percent a month occurs for the period of delay. With the positive influence of the Watershed Project on the entire development of the village – power, tractors, etc. – the loan situation has, in total, clearly improved.

Village Corporate Society

Since 1957 all landowners have been members of the "Village Corporate Society", which has created its own crop-loans.

A difference is made between "short term loan" (stl) and "long term loan" (ltl).

A "short term loan" runs for one year, at 14 percent interest.

A "long term loan" runs for five, seven or ten years at 17 percent interest.

On average, farmers have until now received crop-loans in the amount of from 3,500. Rs per hectare (ha). The condition is that the loan taker owns at least one hectare of land. One only receives a loan for a tractor if he has owned for more than 6 hectares of land.

Banks

In comparison to normal banking conditions:

A "short term loan" runs for one year, at 10 percent interest.

A "long term loan" runs for five, seven or ten years at 14 percent interest.

The difference between the various loan conditions balance each other out when compared to the conditions for defaults in payments and repayment insurance.

Summary

Important Objectives Attained

As a summary, I would like to mention two objectives that, in my estimation, were attained completely: the project objective and the goal of the trip.

The Watershed Project

In connection with developmental "aid" I have already read much about large, doubtful projects, ineffective or counter-productive money or capital transfers or simply egoistically motivated operations within the military-economic process of under-developed countries. One should even approach the greatest gifts with suspicion: "September wheat"⁷. The terms of trade are always defined by the powerful.

The Watershed Project shows, as far as my observations are sufficient, no signs of grave systemic error – on the contrary:

- The Project is based on democratic processes.
- Participation on the basis of agreement also means obligations for all families that participate.
- The slowness of project development avoids social, economic, ecological and cultural injury. Too great demands and too many burdens on people and nature are avoided.
- The background to and reasons for poverty are reflected upon in this project. This is why increasing the availability of water and the construction of certain social and communicative structures are located at the center of project start phase.
- There are no technological leaps: the facilities, ditches, hills, wells, etc. are constructed with suitable and familiar technological means.
- Through the participation of all families in the project and the opportunity to earn money alongside voluntary work, the distribution of the odds among the poor and the rich families are improved.

⁷ "September wheat" is a film that vividly shows how gifts of wheat destroy existing and functional domestic infrastructure and production because the domestic market naturally cannot compete against free grain. If the home market is destroyed, then wheat must be imported and natural resources exported. The vicious circle has been constructed.

As already mentioned above: WOTR is a project built to last, this means a system that goes beyond generations that is constructed for the purpose of forming future-oriented village and regional development. This is why it also seems to me that the interconnected approach of economic, ecological, social and cultural setting of objectives is very important. Lasting developmental policies are forward-looking.

The Objective of the Trip

To identify oneself with the goal of fighting poverty is an extremely abstract demand, quick to be formulated. To learn or to experience what poverty means or to speak to a poor family in order to experience poverty is not so quickly done.

My reflections about poverty, exclusion and the assessment of them in my, until now, alien value system, is not yet and will probably not be concluded.

Placing Poverty on the Federal Government's Agenda for the First Time

“At the beginning of September 2000, 146 national and governmental leaders at the millennium summit of the United Nations in New York agreed to create the world in the new millennium as a bit more humane and with more justice. They concretely obligated themselves to reducing the proportion of the world's population that is extremely poor by half by the year 2015.

National program of action: Chancellor Gerhard Schröder announced a national program of action at the millennium summit in which the federal government points out what they will contribute in order to reach this challenging goal. This program is, in the meantime, being elaborated by the federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and was adopted by the federal cabinet with the title "Fighting Poverty – a global duty with the contribution of the federal government for the global reduction by half of extreme poverty".

With that, for the first time in the history of the federal government, fighting global poverty moved onto the agenda of the whole federal government. This means, that fighting poverty no longer belongs to the developmental department, but rather specialized policies in all departments will orient themselves in the future to how global poverty can be stemmed.” (according to an excerpt from “SPD-Intern” 4/2001)

Reflections and Thanks

Length of Time

The planned time budget for this exposure and informational trip was ideal. Too short to experience more, too long with a view to work at home.

Officials will – at any other time of time planning, as well – sometimes not be able to participate over the total length of time because as a rule a very heavy set of appointments -- often determined by others -- exists.

The excellent written material for the preparation, enhanced by preparatory and follow-up conversations, very positively supported the time plan.

Other Themes

Background, Reasons, Causes, Effects and Results of

- International division of labor
- Migratory movements
- Distribution of resources, disappearance of resources, political power
- Factors influencing the climate
- Definitions of poverty in connection with the question: "What should be overcome and in whose interest?"

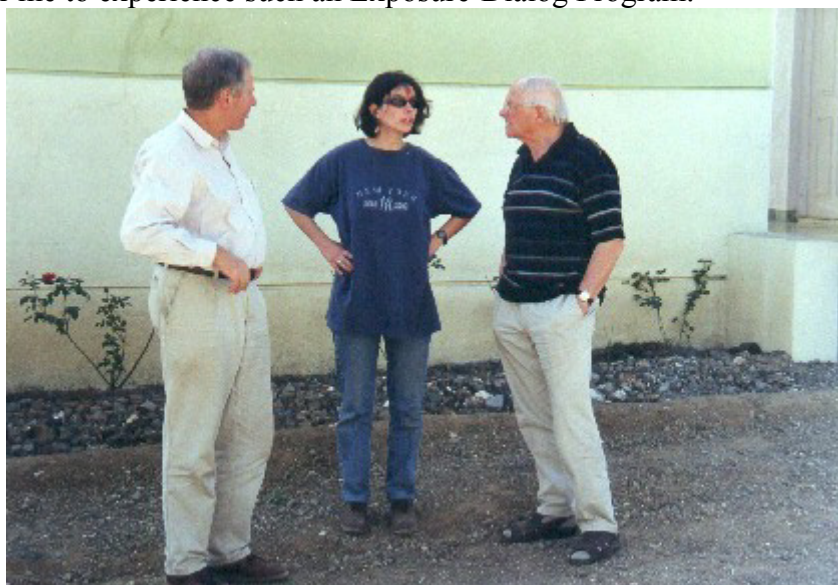
Do we really want to orient overcoming poverty to our categories of wealth – and what does that mean for us?

So Few Favors as Possible

I recommend doing without special exposure and informational stays for officials. For me it was very important that my formal status in Parliament played a subordinate roll. Therefore, I introduced myself as a heavy current electrician and mathematician who only has been a part of the German Parliament for a short time.

My Thanks

I would like to thank once again the organizers and everyone who guaranteed the specialized and pedagogical background, the Society for the Promotion of North-South Dialog, and especially Ms. Ute Bernauer and Karl Osner, for one of the most interesting weeks of my life. Without your very personal engagement, it never would have been possible for me to experience such an Exposure-Dialog Program.



Ute Bernauer, Karl Osner(right)

Many thanks!

Appendix

Digression: THE WORLD AND WE

As I was writing my report about the Exposure-Dialog Program, I received the following email from a friend in Heidelberg with the request that I pass it on to other interested persons:

“If we you reduce all humanity to a village of 100 inhabitants – but with respect to the proportions of all existing peoples, this village would be put together thus:

57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 Americans (North and South-), 8 Africans
52 would be women, 48 would be men
70 non-whites, 30 whites
70 non-Christians, 30 Christian
89 heterosexuals, 11 homosexuals

6 people would own 59 percent of the entire world’s wealth and all 6 people would come from the USA
80 would not have sufficient living conditions
70 would be illiterate
50 would be undernourished
1 would die
2 would be born
1 would have a PC
1 would have a academic degree

When one considers the world in this way, the need for togetherness, understanding, acceptance and education will be clear to anyone.

Think about this:

- If you wake up healthy and not sick tomorrow, you are luckier than one million human beings who will not experience next week.
- If you have never experienced a battle in a war, never experienced loneliness because of imprisonment, the agony of torture or have felt hunger, then you are luckier than 500 million people in the world.
- If you can go to church without fear that you will be threatened with arrest or death, then you are luckier than 3 billion people in the world.
- If you find food in your refrigerator, if you are clothed, with a roof over your head and if you have a bed to lie down in, then you are richer than 75 percent of the inhabitants of this world.
- If you have an account at the bank, some money in your wallet and some change in a small container, then you count among the 8 percent of the well off of this world.
- If you read this piece of information, then you have been blessed double, because: Someone thought about you and you are not among the 2 billion human beings who are unable to read – and you have a PC!

I think that such a report is a fine opportunity to pass these thoughts on.

Glossary /Abbreviations⁸

Capacity Building Phase	Project phase in which the participants must prove their ability to realize the Watershed Program at the community level.
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (support by Single Plan 23 and by means from “Financial Cooperation” and “Technical Cooperation”)
Full Implementation Phase	Project phase which follows the capacity building phase.
EDP	Exposure and Dialog Program
Forest and Revenue Department	Ministry for Forests and Natural Wealth Administration
Forest Protection Committee – FPC	Committee for the protection and care of woods.
Full Implementation Phase	Implementation phase
Gram Sabha	Village assembly
GTZ	German Society for Technical Cooperation (the capacity building phase is supported; its partner is the WOTR)
KfW	Lending institution for reconstruction (supports infrastructure measures in the full implementation phase of a project. Its partner is the NABARD)
KfW	Lending institution for reconstruction
ltl	long term loan
Maintenance Fund	Fund for maintenance
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development. (is under the Indian Finance Ministry).
Nistar	Nistar concentrates on traditional rights as regards acquisition of forest fruits. These rights are found in forest areas in which the population living there obtains the greater part of their livelihood from traditional yields. The meaning has remained the same until today. The distribution of forest fruit occurs according to a determined ratio by which the poor and landless are given an advantage.
NRO	Non-governmental organization
NSD	North- South Dialog
Panchayat	Village or district councils
Pani Panchayat	Access to distribution and use of water according to the principle of equality. Water is community property and that is why it is accessible to all, regardless of land and the ownership of the source of water.
Project Funds	Funds for a project
Project Sanctioning and Steering Committee	Approval agreement which has been settled by the NABARD.
Rural Development and Water Conservation Department	Ministry for Rural Development and Water Conservation.
Sarpanch	Mayor
Shramdan	Voluntary work by village inhabitants for the community.
Soil Conservation and Training Institute	Training institute for protecting the soil.
stl	short term loan
Village Watershed Committees – VWC	Committee for the regeneration of a watershed area.
VSHG	Village Self-Help Groups
Watershed	Catchment area of a river that includes all natural water resources (precipitation, springs, tributaries).
WOTR	Watershed Organization Trust

⁸ Additional excerpt from the documents of the Society for the Promotion of North-South Dialog