

# 25 Years of Development



People's Rural Education Movement (PREM)

Mandiapalli, Post: Rangailunda, Berhampur 760 007, Ganjam District, Orissa State, India

Website: [www.prem.org.in](http://www.prem.org.in)

Email: [preoffice\\_1@sify.com](mailto:preoffice_1@sify.com)

Telephone: +91-680-2242266

Fax: +91-680-2242401





25 Years of  
Development

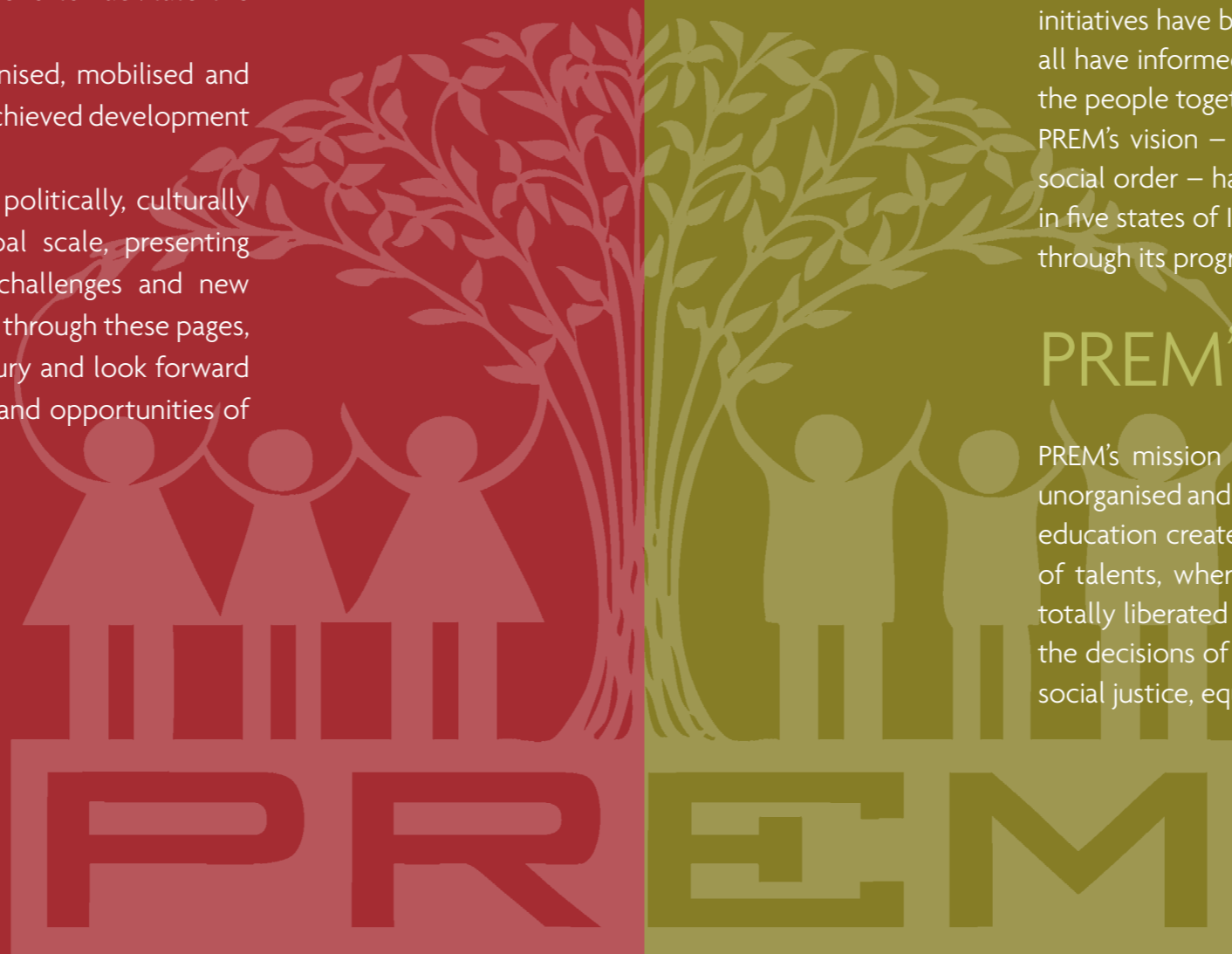
# The People's Movement

In 2009 PREM celebrates 25 years of development work. What began as a grass-roots initiative to facilitate functional literacy, functional skill improvement and organisation among communities in Orissa has evolved into a movement that addresses the issues which exist among the marginalised people in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Throughout the process of growth and change PREM has remained a movement of the people which belongs to the people. It is only through their ownership of the movement that people come together and initiate interventions that will enable them to develop as individuals and communities, to assert their rights, become empowered and break the cycle of indebtedness and disadvantage. PREM the organisation is part of this movement and its role is to facilitate the people in this process.

For a quarter of a century, the people have organised, mobilised and motivated themselves and through doing so have achieved development goals that are shared and sustainable.

In the last 25 years much has changed – socially, politically, culturally and economically – at local, national and global scale, presenting the people and their communities with fresh challenges and new opportunities. As we celebrate together we reflect, through these pages, on the achievements of the last quarter of a century and look forward to working together to meet both the challenges and opportunities of the next 25 years and beyond.

Jacob Thundyil  
President – PREM



# An Overview

In 1980 a group of social activists, led by Jacob Thundyil and Chacko Paruvanany, initiated a functional literacy programme among the disadvantaged communities of Mohana Block in the Gajapati district of Orissa State. In 1984 PREM was registered as a voluntary organisation under the Societies Registration Act, by which time its operational area had extended to 200 villages.

In the last 25 years PREM has worked with communities on a broad range of development initiatives: agro- and social forestry; education; health; microfinance; water and environmental sanitation; education and child development; child rights; self-governance; disability and disaster preparedness and relief.

Pilot projects, such as spice cultivation and processing, village shop enterprise and bee keeping, have been introduced. Many projects and initiatives have been successful, others have not met their objectives but all have informed, motivated, inspired and ultimately enabled PREM and the people together to plan and build for the future.

PREM's vision – to assist the people in organising themselves in a new social order – has spread and is shared by 1,350,000 of the most people in five states of India who are now actively involved with the movement through its programme initiatives and its many networking partners.

## PREM's Vision and Mission

PREM's mission is to create a new social order in which the present unorganised and marginalised people have a say in decision making, where education creates awareness and develops skills and fosters the growth of talents, where culture is ever creative, where men and women are totally liberated from all dehumanising and oppressive forces and where the decisions of individuals and communities are based on the values of social justice, equalities, truth, freedom and the dignity of human life.



# 25 years of development PREM's Story



*New horticulture and agriculture initiatives have enabled villagers in tribal areas to introduce new crop types, improve yield, increase income and provide enough food for their families.*



## 1984 – Functional Literacy

In 1984 members of a team of young social activists traveled to Poona to learn about Paulo Freire's approaches to popular education and political empowerment and to complete training in functional literacy. On their return to Orissa this group selected 15 villages in Mohana Block (then in Ganjam district) and worked with the communities to help organise the people, and improve functional capacity and literacy. Through using this approach the team was able to support the villagers to collaborate in meetings where their problems were prioritised, discussed and solutions found. The same year PREM was registered as a voluntary organisation under the Societies Registration Act.

## 1985 – Momentum Builds for People's Organisations

As a result of their work with the communities, the team from PREM noticed how all decision making in meetings was by men. In addressing the need for opportunity for women and children to participate in the decision making, PREM initiated Mahila Manda - a platform for liberation – to encourage and propagate the involvement of women and children in all decisions made.

## 1986 – Popular Education

For many generations people from marginalised communities have been unable to break the cycle of poverty as a result of indebtedness. A lack of substantive assets was a barrier to getting loans through financial institutions and many people from Scheduled Tribes and Schedules Castes were forced to borrow from moneylenders and landlords for marriage and funeral ceremonies and for hospital care. Many were unable to meet the high rates of interest and make repayments and as a result lost their property and land. To help the people understand the cycle of indebtedness and break free from it, PREM introduced Paulo Freire's approach of action and reflection. A song – Marumma Dhoni (Voice of the Struggling Hearts) – was composed and popularised throughout Orissa to awaken the consciousness of the people to the causes of bondage and their means of liberation.

## 1987 – Horticulture

A survey conducted in 1986 identified the alarming rate of deforestation in tribal areas. As a result of the increase in the population, it was no longer possible to shift cultivation resulting in soil erosion and landslides. A small team from PREM visited a project in the Philippines to learn about the benefits and processes of moving from cultivation to horticulture and then returned to share their experiences in a pilot project in Mohana Block. The team established fruit tree plantation and intercropping on five acres of land, including cashew and pineapple which had not previously been introduced to Gajapati. The pilot demonstrated that the yield from these five acres was four times greater than in five acres of land under shifting cultivation.

## 1988 – Livelihood

Following the success of the pilot programme the previous year, the horticulture initiative was taken up by the people of 120 tribal villages as a way of improving their livelihood options while also better protecting the forest environment. Officials working in the District Administration quickly recognised that this approach also halted the rate of deforestation and approached PREM to offer its support in rolling out the initiative to other blocks of Gajapati.

## 1989 – Federation of People's Organisations

PREM again found inspiration from the Philippines in 1989 when the President, Jacob Thundyil, travelled to the islands to visit people's movements, including the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement and BYAN, where the people had organised themselves and registered as co-operative societies. On returning to India he brought together CBOs from Block and District level and worked with them to register as co-operative societies and, together, form the Federation of People's Organisations enabling them to represent their collective interests in propagating livelihood interests.





Above:  
Vocational and life skills training  
have enabled many young people  
to find good employment and  
livelihood opportunities in Orissa.

Left and right:  
SHGs Microfinance projects have  
enabled women to come together,  
developing entrepreneurial and  
leadership skills.



### 1990 – ‘Each One Teach One’

The third component of Paulo Freire’s approach to popular education is functional literacy and in 1990 PREM addressed directly the low levels of literacy among the people of its programme areas. At that time literacy was only 23% among men and 8% among women. A team of programme staff, village leaders and PRI representatives travelled to Kerala to study a project that had been initiated in marginalised communities which had achieved 100% functional literacy among the people within 100 days. The ‘Each One Teach One’ campaign, supported by OXFAM Australia, was implemented in 1,000 villages in Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamal. PREM developed publicity materials to popularise the concept that literacy is the responsibility of everyone and prepared learning to enable volunteers, mostly college students, to use in the communities. At the end of 100 days, 86% of the people in the project area were able to write their names and 53% were able to read write Oriya at a basic functional level.

### 1991- Fellowships

By 1991 PREM programme staff and volunteers and communities were working closely together on a variety of development initiatives in Ganjam and Gajapati. The success of the approach of social mobilisation prompted PREM to consider how it could be replicated and spread to other areas. With the support of OXFAM Australia, PREM identified socially committed people from universities and colleges in 30 Blocks of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and awarded them fellowships which would enable them to be trained and financially supported to work as social activists.

### 1992 – Microfinance

Through collaboration with PREM, people from marginalised communities had, by the early 1990s, begun to engage in diverse livelihood initiatives and organise themselves into trade co-operatives. However, potential for growth of trading enterprises remained a challenge as financial institutions offered no loan provision for the economically poor. With the support of NOVIB Netherlands, PREM programme staff had the opportunity to visit microfinance projects in villages in Bangladesh and

Sri Lanka and be trained in management of microfinance. On returning to Orissa the team devised and implemented a pilot microfinance scheme in 1,000 villages.

### 1993 – Vocational Training

Save the Children Fund, UK had selected PREM as a partner organisation when an epidemic of meningitis in Gajapati District required intervention for control. Save the Children and went on to formalise the relationship and work on a long-term project focused on children aged 14+ who were not attending or had dropped out of school. The organisations jointly decide that vocational training would help young people to develop a life skill, earn a living and so avoid migrating to large cities to find work. Over a two year period 150 adolescents completed training in skills such as masonry, carpentry, driving, motor mechanic and fish processing at centres in Chandragiri and Mandiapalli. With these skills they were able to return to their villages to earn a living and support their communities.

### 1994 – Cooperatives for Women

The coastal communities of Orissa are among some of the most marginalised in the state and traditionally fisher people have made a meager income sold their produce locally. In 1994 PREM organised training programmes for women of the fishing communities in collaboration with the Orissa University of Agriculture Gopalpur campus. The training focused on hygienic methods of preparing and processing fish and developing diversified products such as fish pickles and shark fins which could be exported to Japan. To support the women in marketing their products PREM assisted them in establishing six cooperatives and applying for credit from the Government to set up small business enterprises and increased their income.





Left:  
In 1998 Bharat Mata residential facility opened its doors to girls from tribal villages

Below:  
With the support of international and local NGOs, PREM supported many communities in rebuilding homes and livelihoods after the devastation of the 1999 Super Cyclone.

Left page:  
The introduction of new turmeric varieties in Kandhamal inspired the formation of over 40 cooperatives to process and market the spice.



## 1995 – Food Security

In all its development interventions PREM has been sensitive to the innate wisdom and traditions of the communities it works with. Tribal culture is based on shared ownership and collective responsibility and the example of the Soara tribe provided PREM with the vision to establish grain banks for food security. In Soara communities every household would contribute its surplus of grain to a community bank which would then be redistributed among all households during lean times. This principle was popularised by PREM among all its programme communities and supported by Save the Children Fund which gave funding to PREM to match every 1kg of grain deposited in the community food bank. Within the first year 80% of need in food shortage periods was met by the deposits in the bank. The concept of practice of food security is now firmly embedded in the programme areas with each village managing its own grain bank.

## 1996 – Child Centred Community Development

A rights-based approach to human development has always been at the centre of PREM's work, from micro- to macro-level empowerment. However, an evaluation study by the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, identified that only adults were benefitting from PREM's initiatives. To address this imbalance PREM approached Plan International, a UK based charity which works exclusively on child-centred development initiatives and child rights. At this time Plan was working with partner organisations in Tami Nadu and representatives from PREM closely studies the work and approaches of these organisations before establishing a partnership with PREM has grown in the last 13 years.

## 1997 –Livelihood Initiatives in Kandhamal

Kandhamal District (then known as Phulbani) is the centre of turmeric production in Orissa which provides many tribal people with their principal source of income. This income, however, at Rs15/- per kg was low in comparison to the yield. PREM contacted the Spice Board of India and arranged for the turmeric to be tested. The turmeric was found to be of low quality at 1.9% curcumin, while export quality turmeric is at 5%. In a pilot project varieties of turmeric from Assam and Kerala were introduced to 60 tribal villages of Kandhamal. When tested at the first harvest the turmeric was found to have 5.9% of

curcumin, increasing its market value to Rs45/- per kg. The pilot scheme was extended to 500 villages and 40 co-operative societies were established to process and market the turmeric with the support of NORAD.

## 1998 – Bharat Mata

In 1997 PREM-Plan began sponsorship of 1,000 children which rapidly increased to 3,000 in the same year. Many of these children, and particularly girls, were deprived of education due to a lack of school facilities close to their villages and low family income which resulted in many caring for younger siblings or working in local agriculture. At this time there were no residential schools for girls in Gajapati and so, with the support of Plan, PREM proposed to build and establish a residential educational facility for girls at Paralakhemundi. In 1998 the school – Bharat Mata – opened its doors to 400 girls. Since then many more girls have received schooling and vocational training at the centre.

## 1999 – Disaster Relief

Orissa's beautiful and fascinating coastline, sitting on the Bay of Bengal, is vulnerable to cyclones. In late October 1999, a super cyclone, the worst in a century, hit the Orissa shores claiming at least 10,000 lives and leaving many more thousands of people homeless and destitute. In response to this dreadful event, PREM rapidly formed a network of 25 coastal NGOs supported by Save the Children Fund, Plan International, OXFAM Australia and the Lutheran World Service to meet the needs of relief and rehabilitation in five coastal districts of the State.

The immediate priority was to find shelter, food, clothing and basic equipment for 62,000 families who had lost their homes and livelihoods. In the weeks and months following the disaster the network worked with farmers to help them begin cultivation again by desilting and providing water pumps to restore the land and supplying seeds for planting. Some 25,000 families were supported with animal husbandry initiatives and support was given for repairing damaged school buildings to enable children to return to education as soon as possible. Cyclone shelters were also constructed and in Gopalpur-on-Sea a construction project was initiated with the direct participation of the people who had lost their homes in the effort to rebuild housing





*New and exciting opportunities await young people who have completed vocational training courses.*



## 2000 – Bridge Courses

In 1998 a baseline survey completed by PREM in Gajapati District showed that there remained a high proportion of children among Tribal and Dalit communities were not enrolled in school or had dropped out of formal education. In seeking a solution to this PREM studied the work of Professor Sanchar Sinha who had initiated a pilot study in Andhra Pradesh to assist children from Scheduled Castes to resume education. In applying the principles to the needs of the children of Orissa, PREM established three-month full-time Bridge Courses in Mohana and Chandragiri Blocks and supporting children with tuition and accommodation, food and care.

After two months of initiation children on the course were returning to their villages and motivating their peers to pursue education. Between 1998 and 2000 a total of 2,250 children completed the Bridge Course and all enrolled in mainstream education. PREM established a tracking cell to monitor attendance of these children and found 90% of them were retained in education full time.

## 2001 – Social Mobilisation in Chilika

PREM first began working with the people of the islands of Chilika Lake in 1995 on micro-credit and social mobilisation projects. At that time social exclusion of Dalits and Fisher People was intense and manifested itself in every aspect of their lives, including the exclusion of Dalits from high caste villages and Dalit children from schools. In 2001, with the support of Plan International, PREM began the process of liberation from this discrimination through child-focused development. In initiating its programme PREM took an inclusive approach and also addressed the needs of people of high castes who were economically very poor. In this way a bridge between the caste communities was established creating a strong base for integration and enlightenment and the eradication of discrimination.

## 2002 – Propagation of Horticulture in Tribal Areas

The success of PREM's pilot project in 1997 had influenced the State Government of Orissa to implement similar initiatives. However, many villages in the tribal areas were not included in the programmes and the tribal people remained without the resources to establish horticulture projects. PREM approached the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID) with a proposal for a five year horticulture project for 223 villages, to convert 30,000 acres of land from shifting to horticulture based cultivation, training the people in techniques such as stone bonding, irrigation, multi- and intercropping and providing seedlings.

## 2003 – Professional Vocational Training

Children from marginalised communities, like children anywhere, have the right to reach their true potential, a right that elementary education does not meet in full. To be able to compete with children from mainstream communities tribal and Dalit children need to complete education at secondary level and acquire skills to help them break the cycle of indebtedness and risks of becoming economic migrants. By 2003 PREM was supporting 200 tribal and Dalit children to study at English Medium and Central Schools, where the language of instruction is English. The standard of teaching in these schools enables the children to compete for places in higher education and enhances employment opportunities available to them.

In 2003 PREM also focused on children from its programme area who had completed secondary education. Higher education remains unattainable for the vast majority of them but in acquiring vocational skills there is potential for them to find employment in professions such as hotel management and nursing and in business. PREM therefore worked to help support young tribal and Dalit people in training courses with accredited organisations leading to nationally recognised professional qualifications.





Left page:  
Free medication from Village Pharmacy Depots is effective in treating many common diseases, such as diarrhoea and typhoid. Before the PRHPS, people suffering with such conditions would be unable to afford treatment



## 2004 – People’s Rural Health Promotion Scheme

The marginalised communities in PREM’s programme area have poor access to Government healthcare provision and as a result suffer high levels of communicable and water-borne diseases and infant and maternal mortality. The people in remote villages are also vulnerable to exploitation private health practitioners or village quacks. To address the health and economic needs PREM implemented a micro-insurance health pilot scheme in 500 villages with a total population of 100,000 people. An annual membership fee of Rs20/- per person enabled PREM, with the support of Plan, to establish village pharmacy depots with trained volunteers which could successfully treat approximately 75% of conditions within three days. A health committee was established in each community to manage the scheme funds and make decisions on referral to PHCs and hospitals for more complicated medical conditions. The scheme, with its affordable and accessible healthcare provision, has resulted in improved health seeking behaviour among the target population and reduction in long-term effects or even mortality from common conditions such as diarrhoea and typhoid.

## 2005 – Relief for Indians Affected by the Tsunami

The catastrophic South East Asian Tsunami in the final days of 2004 devastated many communities on the eastern seaboard of India. OXFAM Australia invited PREM to coordinate the relief effort for the 42,000 families who had been left without homes or livelihood. PREM initiated a network of 15 NGOs from Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry to provide shelter, food and water, clothing and basic cooking equipment for each family. In the effort for rehabilitation the coalition of NGOs worked to provide training and funding to Self Help Groups (SHGs) for livelihood initiatives such as purchase the boats and nets for fishing, animal husbandry and small enterprises including fish vending and shops.

## 2006 – Strengthening of the People’s Organisations

From the beginning PREM recognised the importance of people’s organisations as the focal point in the process of liberation from indebtedness and disadvantage. It supported men and women in forming committees and organisations for men and women at village, Panchayat and Block level and then initiated the process of scaling up these organisations for representation at District and State level through federations such as Orissa Adivasi Manch, Kalinga Fisher People’s Forum and Orissa Dalit Network. This experience enabled PREM to facilitate the formation of a national-level networking organisation for tribal people from 18 states: National Advocacy Council for the Development of Indigenous People (NACDIP). The principle was replicated in 2000 with the formation of the East Coast Fisher People’s Forum, which represented fisherfolk from five states on the eastern seaboard of India. In addition to PREM’s vision for power to the powerless, it also sought to facilitate assets to the assetless and for this purpose PREM initiated Utkal Mahila Sanchaya Bikas, a microfinance network which is now a member of the Indian National Federation of Self Help Groups (INFOS). Following the 2004 tsunami, PREM facilitated the formation of the Bharat Multistate Cooperative Society, a microcredit network. In 2006 an intensive training programme was initiated with representatives of these organisations to help strengthen their ability to participate in Governance and development processes.





Right:  
Many prominent politicians and  
campaigners have supported the  
lobby and advocacy initiatives  
of PREM.

Left and above:  
*'Learning through playing and  
playing through learning' – young  
tribal children can explore their  
potential in a friendly pre-school  
environment which focuses on their  
language, culture and traditions.*

## 2007 – Pre-school Education for Tribal Children

Throughout India tribal culture is rich and distinct in language, creativity and tradition. In Orissa there are 62 tribal groups, many of whom have their own language and live in remote locations outside the mainstream of society. For children from such communities integration into formal education can be very difficult and as a result retention rates at primary school are low as they struggle with official language and cultural references. In 2007 PREM, supported by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands, initiated the Child Based Community Project in 350 tribal villages in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Only 25 of these villages had any Government ICDS provision. The aim of the project was to improve home-based care of 0-2 year olds and establish 350 pre-school centres run by a teacher from the community and using a curriculum based in the local mother tongue and local cultural context. PREM worked with the Bernard Van Leer Foundation to train local girls in play-way teaching methods and develop a curriculum focused on the local environment, using low or no cost local materials for creative sessions and drawing on the rich tribal traditions of song, dance and story telling. To support the children with the transition to primary school the official state language is introduced at the age of four and from five each child is introduced to the local primary school with day visits.



## 2008 – Advocacy and Lobby for Tribal Land Rights

In 2006 the Government of India passed a ground-breaking piece of legislation – the Forest Rights Act (FRA). This Act recognises the legal rights of tribal people and other traditional forest dwellers over the land which they have, for generations, inhabited. Since the Act's notification at the beginning of 2008, the process of implementing its provisions at grass-roots level and enabling tribal people to apply for ownership has been slow and obstructed by legal objections and lack of clarity on the legislation at state level. By summer 2008 applications in some states were not being processed. To advocate the cause of the tribal people, PREM, in collaboration with National Advocacy Council for the Development of Indigenous People (NAC-DIP) and Orissa Adivasi Manch (OAM), began activities in October which would result in lobbying directly with central government politicians and policy makers. Consultations in 11 states facilitated networking and sharing of experiences.

## 2009 – Developing through Peace

In August 2008 communal conflict erupted in the Kandhamal district of Orissa resulting in many deaths and thousands of people left homeless and destitute. Communities where PREM's programmes are managed by network partner organisations were not affected by the violence and disorder as a result of the secular approach taken to development intervention. PREM was approached by an international NGO to assist children affected by the conflict and, with the support of NEG Fire, it devised a programme of intensive revision for 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> standard students whose preparation for the critical board exams had been disrupted by the tragedy. In February and March 2009 community educators trained by PREM coached 1887 students in 67 locations, including the relief camps, for the board exams in April. Shortly after this project was completed, Concern Worldwide approached PREM to initiate a peace building project in the villages affected by the communal discord. PREM, its network partners have worked to together with communities and PRIs to build relations and develop sustainable, secular community based organisations in the affected villages.



# PREM

## The Future

As we reflect on the past 25 years we, more than ever, need to consider the future and plan for tomorrow. India's emergence as a global economy has brought opportunity and prosperity for some but displacement and misery for many of our tribal brothers and sisters. Vast numbers of our young people who have to move to find work in the powerhouse cities of Mumbai, Hyderabad, Delhi and elsewhere are more vulnerable to exploitation and the threat posed by HIV. Our beautiful landscape – its coastal areas and its lush hills and forests which have provided the people of Orissa with their habitat and livelihood for centuries – is increasingly exposed to the devastating effects of climate change.

In our 25<sup>th</sup> year we are implementing three new programme initiatives: HIV/AIDS with the support of Plan International and ensuring transparency and good governance in public service practice with the support of Department for International Development (DFID), UK. With the assistance of Concern Worldwide we will work to build for a harmonious and prosperous future with the communities of Kandhamal affected by communal unrest in 2008. With the friendship and collaboration of all our supporters we will continue to work to achieve our core vision and ensure that the voices of the marginalised are heard in every corner of society.



Thank you to all our friends and supporters (IBC)

INSERT LOGOS OF ALL CURRENT DONORS

Insert list of all former donor agencies