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People's Plan for a Samarth Bastar

1. Suggested way forward

1.1 Possibilities for further action

The foregoing sections contain an assessment of the current status of the various types of capital in Bastar district, and in the process, of the various aspects of the social and economic life in Bastar. This is followed by an attempt, based on the framework adopted, to understand the reasons for under-achievement of the potential. Finally, certain steps have been suggested based on the analysis. The suggestions would hold any relevance, only when the ways to implement these are discussed. The following process is proposed to take forward these recommendations, as amended after comprehensive discussions with all concerned, and other recommendations which would come up in the process of consultations.

1. Meetings as also a series of discussions with people would be held, individually as well as in groups, to elicit and discuss suggestions, feedback etc. The discussions would be with a wide range of stakeholders such as government officials, political leaders, professionals, civil society organisations and leaders, media, academicians, industrialists and businessmen, farmers, forest dwellers etc. In other words, the discussions would be in the spirit of the consultations under the concept of Panch Mukhi Samavaay as discussed in the introductory section.
2. Various groups would be formed for different subjects or sectors, based on interests and background of people. These subject-wise teams would keep meeting and discussing amongst themselves as also with others. Discussions could be also be continued, between meetings, over email or social media as well, as considered suitable.
3. A larger group, or the co-ordinating group, would also be formed which would keep meeting and discussing the suggestions from the subject teams. The discussions should be widespread, with all stakeholders and those concerned about the issues and not limited to the members of the group which would be co-ordinating and driving the discussions.
4. The groups finally arrive at suggested courses of action for the different sectors after the consultations.
5. An executing group is formed to consider the ways and to take steps for the implementation of the recommended course of action. This group too could have sub-groups based on subjects / sectors or geographical location, as considered desirable. Timelines and responsibilities would be decided.

6. While the groups would have consulted various officials of government departments and other agencies during the process of discussions, at this stage concrete proposals would have to be submitted to the government departments and other agencies by the Samavaay to seek support from government departments or other organisations for the plan of action. The support of the government agencies would be essential for effective implementation of most of the action plans.
7. A few villages would be short-listed for pilot action and discussions would be initiated with the residents. For urban issues, one or two towns could be taken up. Meetings would be held with the members of the villages or localities in town. The projects intended to be taken up would be discussed with them. After their consent and suggestions, three to five villages or clusters of villages could be selected for focussed action out of the villages shortlisted.
8. Intensive discussions would be continued with the villagers for their taking ownership of the projects. Based on discussions with the villagers, groups would be formed for various activities. The existing SHGs or their members could also be identified for leading the projects. Projects would be chosen by the villagers after inputs from the executing team.
9. Ideally, each village or cluster should have more than one projects for implementation. This would give benefits of synergy in community action. For example, processing of farm or forest produce could be taken up along with tourism in the village. Groups for monitoring health and education services should be formed in every village, irrespective of the project. These groups could also be encouraged in villages where there are no projects undertaken under this initiative.
10. Decisions would be taken on the training mechanism, marketing set-up etc. These aspects could also require guidance from external experts which should be arranged for.
11. Efforts should be initiated simultaneously for exploring sources of finance for the projects. These could be government departments or organisations like NABARD; funds from CSR from corporate bodies – local or others; donations from individuals, private businesses, funding agencies etc. Innovative solutions like crowd funding could also be tried out. Loans could be sought for certain activities.
12. The major resources to be mobilised would be voluntary contribution of time, efforts, expertise as well funds and other resources by the volunteers.
13. Once the activities commence, constant monitoring and support would be required. Certain functions could be entrusted to paid staff and professional service providers.
14. Regular meetings of the wider group should continue to be held where the executive team could report the progress, convey their challenges and bottlenecks experienced and discuss ways of resolution. Modifications required in the activities could also be identified.
15. Based on the progress and response from the community, decisions could be taken for expansion of certain activities to other villages as also for modification or closure of certain activities.
16. At some point of time, the question of the nature and legal form of organisation of the various groups – village groups or the steering groups of citizens - would come up

and a decision would have to be taken based on the various factors and merits or demerits of various options.

1.2 Possibilities of various outcomes

Various experiments would be tried out in the course of the rolling out of the above suggestions and others which would come up as discussions and actions progress. Some of the experiments would, no doubt, fail to achieve the desired results. The concept is to initiate community action by citizens for working towards a society progressing on equitable, participative and sustainable paths. If a few of the actions succeed, we could have the satisfaction of seeing some villagers running their own processing units, supplying healthy organic food to consumers, providing a satisfying experience of staying in a serene surroundings to tourists and, most importantly, having a say in managing their own affairs and ensuring better health and education for themselves and their children. We could see some individuals getting a better opportunity to express themselves better and realise their potential better -either by the livelihood activities they can take up, or because of the better education they receive or by excelling in some sport.

Equally important would be the progress we make towards a society where people come together and act, not necessarily for themselves, but for a participative, equitable and sustainable way of living for the society as a whole. No doubt there would be challenges, but the act of coming together and attempting to address those challenges, would itself be a step taken in this jana karma yajna towards what the Mahatma dreamt of – swaraj.
