

## B. Irrigation work benefits marginal farmers' community: A Story of Shahahossainpur GP, Burdwan District

**S**hahahossainpur is a quaint little village. A tributary of river *Damodar* named *Mundeshwari* flows adjacent to the village just embracing it. Most of the residents of *Shahahossainpur* of Jamalpur block in *Burdwan* district are farmers surviving on agriculture as their only means of livelihood. The regional soil has high content of sand due to its river side location. The regional soil characteristics being sandy it's water retention capacity remains remarkably low. There is only 15 *katthas* to a *bigha* of agricultural land at the disposal of each of the farmers and that is all of what they possess as the sole means of their sustenance. In absence of adequate proportion of water in soil whatever is cultivated *from* paddy, sesame, potatoes to vegetables, and the



yield can never be expected to be high. Though at times with heavy monsoon showers the paddy crop used to receive a strong boost, the yields of sesame, vegetables and herbs were as if in perpetual decline. For quite a stretch of time the farmer community could not gain a profit from cultivating sesame and vegetables.

The *River Lift Irrigation Project* was implemented by the department of irrigation by the *Mundeshwari river* side to combat the situation of acute water crisis for extensive agriculture. The project was all about lifting water from the *Mundeshwari* river to irrigate

the adjacent crop fields. The project envisaged 250 *bighas* of agricultural land but it left aside a tract of fifty *bighas* that lay adjacent to two hundred and fifty *bighas*. Thirty household of impoverished farmers resided in the left out fifty *bigha* tract. These thirty households of farmers had also intimated the department of irrigation about their predicament and had wanted the inclusion of the fifty *bigha* tract of agricultural land under the project. They had also learnt from the department that with additional connections of water distribution pipes the fifty *bigha* agricultural tract can be catered and brought under the *River Lift Irrigation Project* thereby enabling them to avail of the benefits of the newly introduced extensive irrigation arrangement. Soon there emerged a robust public demand in favour of introducing similar irrigation system following the principle of Irrigation Department to be undertaken by the *Jyotsriram Gram Panchayat* to include the fifty *bigha* tract. This popular demand was strongly reflected in the *Gram Sansad Sabha* in 2011. In the integrated and comprehensive annual plan for the year 2012-13, *Jyotsriram Gram Panchayat* had prioritized to undertake the work of providing additional pipelines under the guidance and technical expertise of the Irrigation Department to cover the previously excluded area under the *River Lift Irrigation Project*.

Environmental safeguards with all possible environmental risk assessments were made by the *Gram Panchayat* prior to the commencement of the particular work. The scheme was completed in the month of December, year 2012. *Jyotsriram Gram Panchayat* had utilized Rs.3,75,000 from Block Grant conferred by the *Institutional Strengthening of Gram Panchayats Project* ( ISGP Project) and had created an unprecedented example of insightful, poverty alleviating initiative to strengthen and fortify itself.

There was as if an unfolding of a silent revolution leading people towards agricultural prosperity and abundance through acute agricultural and irrigation crisis management. There came an end to anxiety and bliss touched every face. At present the *fifty bighas* of agricultural tract is irrigated. The irrigation system has extended and expanded to nurture fresh tracts of agricultural lands with river water. There has been an inclusion of additional hundred *bighas* of agricultural land which has been brought under its coverage. This has resulted in a remarkable increase in the yield



The marginal peasants of *Shahahossainpur* like *Sanjit Ghosh, Durgapada Mandi, Boku Molla, Khokan Mullick* and others are now practicing gainful agriculture with substantial profit margin. Now the average crop of potatoes have gone up to ninety sack-full in contrast to sixty sack-full (sixty sack-full was prior to the operationalization of the *River Lift Irrigation Project*). The crop of yams has increased to double proportion. The total paddy produce has risen by eight hundred kilograms per *bigha*. While talking with the farmer community residing at the riverside one arrives at an ad hoc profit figure that is astounding. The village now experiences abundance in agricultural produce. As per the market price of additional yield is concerned it stands almost at rupees twenty lac against investment of less than four lakh from Government.